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WITCHCRAFT

HORROR

THE SUPERNATURAL

ROCK GOD
harlan ellison

THE SHADOW
TRADER
wylly folk st. john

A MESSAGE
FOR BROTHER
john lipford

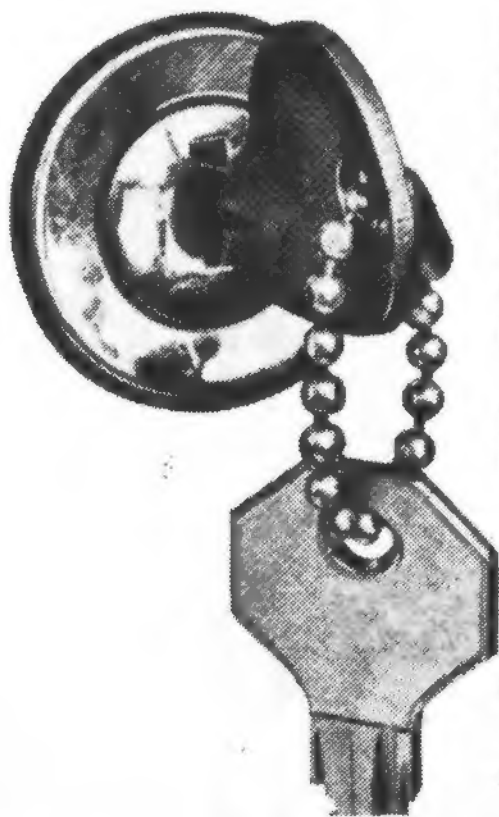
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Coven 13

MAGAZINE

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THE SUPERNATURAL

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ALL NEW STORIES

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Arthur H. Landis

Editor

Jean W. Cirrito

Assistant Editor

Morgan Spector

Technical Director

Artist/COVEN 13

William Stout

Consultant

R. Ebeling

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Editorial and

Advertising Offices:

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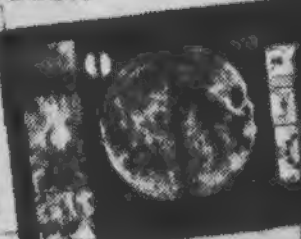
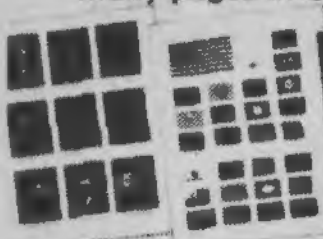
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EDITOR'S CAULDRON

By ARTHUR H. LANDIS

For most editors, caught in the trap of deadlines and conformity, simple survival for themselves and their magazine is an end in itself. To innovate is to invite risk and possible disaster. To actually *drop out* of the milieu of our huckster-dominated media, and into the real world of this latter half of the 20th Century, could induce sheer trauma. A rejection of the mythos of Horatio Alger, Billy Graham, and American advertising has been known to produce that effect.

Yet one need not be a crusader to suggest that somewhere along the line those who control the media must do just that. Recognition *must*

be given to the realities of this new world, else the media, in all its forms, will not only have faulted the finest generation of young people this country has produced, but will have simultaneously denied them an arena for meaningful dialogue.

The question may be asked: just what in the hell does this pontifical tub-thumping have to do with a quality-pulp magazine of the witchcraft, horror, gothic tradition such as COVEN 13?

Our simple answer is that the above applies to all data; to articles, poetry, prose in *any* form, used in the areas of communication—inclusive of The Farmer's Almanac, a Red Skelton TV show, or The Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry.

And that's what it has to do with COVEN 13!

We would suggest, in fact, that the problem of a direct confrontation with reality especially applies to our magazine, since we deal particularly with the occult, the supernatural, and phenomena usually opposed by established religion. We would point out too that this same established religion sector of the metaphysical world is the sector most fearful of any kind of reality.

If we were to follow the sterile practices of *their* conformity, our witches and sorcerers would then all be evil; vampires would cringe solely before crosses despite the myriad religions other than Christianity; voodoo drums invoking Dambala would

be presented with obvious racist overtones, werewolves would all resemble Lon Chaney, Jr., our doctors and scientists would all be mad—and our total efforts would be directed toward not offending the power of the status-quo. Instead we would defend it. We would not dare contribute to the destruction of popular myths for fear of the cretins among us.

We choose not to conform to patterns of nonsense.

In terms of the 'realities' which the others fear, let us make a few points.

Any honest approach to an examination of witchcraft and related religions in this time of advanced sciences, for example, *poses no contradictions*. Indeed, it is only under these new and comparatively *free* conditions—devoid of persecution by state religions and their hierarchies that the black arts et-al. can be objectively examined. The contradiction here—for it does exist—is that those who would mock the black arts as nonsense, themselves attend a denominational church service on Sundays, and involve *themselves* in the parallel frumpery of the very arts and religions they decry.

COVEN'S position is a simple one. We would, in the interest of honest research, examine all religions and mythos equally and objectively; neither denying or subscribing to their pretensions or claims. We would however, a la Voltaire, fight for

their right to parallel existence with each other—no burning stakes, gentlemen; no Ramadan holy wars; no Inquisitions, and no 'Chosen People.' All are equal in the COVEN.

As a matter of fact, to extend this thinking into the area of shock for some of you, let me say this. If your editor were hauled into court tomorrow on some charge or other, he would ask that he be allowed to swear on the *Necronomicon* of the so-called 'mad Arab,' *Abdul Alhazrid*, as a pledge of his veracity. You see, we hold this and other books, such as the Koran, the Torah, the Kama Sutra, the Book of Thoth, or whatever, as equally as potent and sacred as our highly touted King James version of the Bible. . . We suggest that a truly *free* society should do likewise—even to the point of allowing a detainee to swear on nothing at all.

Are we reaching you?

In terms of this *real* world we're talking about, may we further suggest that it is no historical accident that today—with the mass emergence of witchcraft and a hundred related sub-culture religions throughout the Western Hemisphere, that these same arts and religions *identify with progress*. They opt, as it were, for the free society for the simple reason that they can function in that free society, whereas until quite recently, in the *controlled* society of the Judeo-Christian world, they were not free but persecuted.

It is no 'accident' or subversive 'plot' either that sundry 'mod' manifestations of the new witchcraft—other than the delightful enchantments and peregrinations of England's Dame Sybyl Leek, and California's own Dame Marsha Pitman—have been the studied efforts of a great *coven* of young hippy-witches to bring down the Pentagon brick-by-brick, in protest of the Vietnam war. Other, similar, West Coasts *covens*, have put the double-hex on the Oakland Induction Center, and on the Alameda County Sheriff, Frank Madigan.

The Pentagon didn't collapse; nor did Frank Madigan wind up with the triple pox. Bud don't kid yourselves for a second. Our cute little hippy witches were damned *serious*. And they remain serious. And you editor, for one, takes them quite seriously—along with the *equally* serious attitude of the majority of the clergy who also protest the Vietnam war. And that, too, is a part of our new reality.

For COVEN 13 *all* religions exist as phenomena of the world of the unknown—if there be such—of the parallel world, as it were, of the real world. These religions exist, they are in motion. And they reflect quite strongly, *from their particular points of view*, the reality of the times in which we live. Conversely, and to a considerable degree, they also directly influence that reality.

COVEN 13 is vitally concerned with being knowledgeable of these phenomena, for they are, essentially, what we write about. An axiom for us is that the closer we are to both the phenomena and the world as it is—and not as the plastic people tell us it is—the more sophisticated, the more literary, and the more meaningful the work or the story. We absolutely subscribe to the theory that there is no content in stereotyped nonsense.

A particular work of Ray Bradbury is an example of what we mean. It was a simple story from The Golden Apples of the Sun, entitled THE FOGHORN. And it told of the loneliness of a great saurian, the last of its kind on this earth. The saurian despaired in the knowledge that the foghorn of a lighthouse was not, as it had hoped, the voice of a kindred creature, a companion. And we were given a tragic vignette of a life-form other than human which could evoke within us an emotion that made *us*, perhaps, a mite more human. . .

How much better THE FOGHORN, than the Godzillas, et al, who defy all concepts of ecology and evolution, and whose seeming desire is nought but to gobble up errant pedestrians, chase white, protestant, naked females, and kick over Empire State buildings with a huge and taloned foot. One is meaningful, the other idiotic.

No. No, and NO! COVEN 13 will present no ridiculous, freaked-

out monster mummy to gurgle tana leaves, and to drag itself along at 1/8 of a mile per hour, through the fuzz-patrolled, well-lighted suburbs of an American city: and no fruity King Kong will grace our pages to threaten the peace and quiet of our populace and thereby distract them from their *real* problems. We would suggest that the only King Kongs amongst us today are those not evidenced by their size but rather by their neanderthal thinking.

In effect we say this: we do not suggest to any author that a werewolf, a sorcerer, a ghoul, a poltergeist, or what have you, be anything other than what the author wishes it to be. But! And here's the 'rub.' What we do say, is that the phenomenon must be viewed, to the best of the writer's ability, against the real background of the world in which we live. In effect, you can create a ghoul. But to create a non-

sense world to support the existence of your ghoul-uh-unh. . .

Since this editor has long concluded that his generation, too, (the class of '37) related in part to that same real world we've been prattling about—witness our addiction to *Weird Tales*, *Unknown Worlds*, and the like; and since the present generation shows signs of being a helluva lot more hip than we were, our only conclusion is that there is fantastic hope for the future. Perhaps we'll wind up with an amalgam. A joining of forces whose end product will see whole libraries of adult stories to tempt the literary palates of the most demanding.

Our mail, by the way, indicates this possibility.

We will wind this up with the salute of: yours for fat Trolls under bridges—and how they got there; and for poltergeists in the attic—and just what makes them so damned cantankerous. . . .

Yours in the COVEN

ARTHUR H. LANDIS
Editor

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once upon a were- wolf

By Robert L. Davis

Illustrated by William Stout

A mad caprice beneath a Hollywood moon, in which we find no fearsome-fanged creature to try the efforts of Central Casting. HOWEVER! As Bobbie Burns so aptly put it: "A werewolf's a wolf for a' that."

"Look, Henry," I said numbly. My lips moved but I barely heard the words. "That Navajo blanket cost me thirty bucks. You're shedding. So get the hell off it."

I reached for the rye and poured a stiff one.

Henry sniffed. He eyed the bottle.

I hesitated to regard Henry—or

rather, the wet-muzzled bag of bones who insisted he was my good friend Henry Thorndyke—through the bottom of my glass. He was panting. His tongue hung ridiculously over his canines.

I sighed. "How do you want it? In a saucer?"

"Yeah. Or like a straw in a bottle. I saw a bear manage that one

in the San Diego Zoo." He leapt down from the couch and sat on his haunches before the fire. His voice was real enough--the usual plaintive whine.

I retired to the kitchen; returned with a saucer and splashed a finger or two into it. Then, with an ice-cube in the center, I placed it on the floor in front of him. I watched through narrowed eyes while he lapped it up. He burped and coughed and slopped more rye on the hardwood than he did down his gullet.

"Pal," he whined, licking the last drop from his drooping whiskers, "You'll never know--you'll just never know."

I grunted noncommittally in reply. I had made up my mind to be chintzy-mean. It isn't every night, you see, that a large mud-colored dog wanders into my apartment insisting he's my good friend, Henry Thorndyke. I swirled my drink and listened to the tinkle of the solitary ice-cube.

"I'm a *Werewolf*, Ed. You've got to believe me." Henry's slurred whine pleaded for understanding across the short space that separated his mangy muzzle from my bedroom slippers.

I kept my eyes fuzzed. "And I'm 'Charlie's Aunt'." I said. "Look!" I adopted a patronizing air. "Let's just forget it. You'll roll up in the rug. I'll sack out in the chair. Then tomorrow we'll wake up and I'll be Ed 'Surfer' Aines, and you'll be Henry Thorndyke, and that will be

that. We'll make a pact to lay off the pep pills."

"Pills, be-damned!" Henry's voice peaked on a high falsetto. "I tell you Ed, I'm a werewolf, *sans* benefit of LSD. I did it--Me! You know that cult I've been fooling around with? The 'Order of Isis in Amon'? Well I hit on an idea. This is a part of it. And you, Surfer, old pal, are going to help me."

"O.K., Buby," I said dreamily. "I'll be a potato-pancake." It was A.M. already. Henry, after some frantic door scratching, had been with me for all of fifteen minutes. Prior to that I had been burning the midnight with some advertising copy and a short fifth. I had achieved the happy state, actually, and Henry's arrival had seemed but a matter of course.

I looked at him again. . . Lord, he was a sorry looking werewolf. His eyes were pink and bleary. He obviously needed glasses. He was thin, scrawny, and his mangy tail curled with a virginal twist between his legs. I would venture to say that he was a veritable 'flea-bag' too. "Henry the Werewolf," I said softly. "I have seen the millennium."

I closed my eyes. He gnawed at my ankle. I walloped his slobbering muzzle. He retreated to the couch and I said, "Easy does it, White Fang."

"All right!" Henry said. He rubbed his nose with a mud-caked paw. "But you're going to listen to me,

Surfer—Now! If you don't, I'll climb those god-damned stairs and bite your landlady's *tush*."

I went to the kitchen and made coffee. Five cups for me and a pot for Henry. We drank in silence, staring fixedly at each other. Henry interrupted only once. He said, "More sugar." I dumped in a few tablespoons and he stirred it with his paw.

"The reason for this rather mad charade," Henry began to explain between laps, "is because of my obsession; my need for the attentions of the fair McGonigle. She is my *Alpha*, my *Omega*."

At Henry's tendered tid-bit, my eyes lit up like laser beams.

'Mary McGonigle'! I breathed the name reverently. Henry joined me, like a Shetland Pony with asthma. So there *was* a reason to his madness. I looked at him with new respect. McGonigle was the cutest 'Candy' in the entire layout department of Geisenholdt Publications. Creamy skin, round blue eyes, pneumatic legs—Lord! I could smell the fat frying. In the presence of the fair McGonigle, there wasn't a man-jack of us who didn't soil his wes-kit with every gasp—me included; with a special reason. There had been a time, you see, when the McGonigle and me had been *yin* and *yang*. A series of 'happenings', however, had placed me on the doorstep, hat in hand.

I would add that the entire male

complement of Geisenholdts was mad for McGonigle, too. Such was our fate, our *kismet*. And Henry? I gazed at him with the lifted eyebrow.

"The old mind-over-matter stuff, right?" I queried. "You know, you always were the doggy-sort. I imagine you just concentrated on the idea and busted your seams—true?"

"Not true," Henry barked. The Order of Isis in Amon doesn't go for that mesmeric flapdoodle. There are things on this earth, old surfer, that you prosaics never dream of." He leered at me with a nasty canine display of molars.

"All right!" I said. So let's get with it. Normally you're a myopic ninety-nine pounder with a pot belly and horn-rimmed glasses. If you think you've bettered your chances with that get-up, you're nuts!"

I poured my last cup. Dawn peeped through the curtains. I was suddenly and horribly sober.

"In me," Henry confided in Edwardian tones, "you see not a werewolf, but a knight errant. I wish to save the fair McGonigle from the meshes of that dastardly cad, Atlas Birch; and in so doing prepare the stage for my own solicitations—most proper of course."

"She has been *seeing* Atlas," I agreed.

Henry said pontifically: "As a matter of fact, though he's been Navy Quartermaster Reserve all dur-

ing this Asian unpleasantness—I suspect him of *pinko* sympathies.”

I gagged on that one. “That stacks up well,” I said bluntly, “with *your* stretch in states-side procurement.”

“Oh, yeah!” Henry returned scathingly. “It’s common knowledge, Surfer, that *you* never got beyond the Military Government exams at Camarillo.”

“Forget it,” I barked. I was getting to *sound* like Henry. “What’s the plot? And how fits the fur and the bright red eyes?”

Henry cosied up. “Well it’s like this,” he said. “About a month ago, when I became aware that Atlas was seeing altogether too much of our Mary I ran a ‘make’ on him through the good offices of my Uncle, Flieder, in Naval Intelligence. *Well let me tell you*—Our Atlas barely got his discharge in time. He was caught *en flagrante* in a lifeboat with a decrepit Wac. And that ditty about being ‘nervous in the service’ became a reality in his case. He barely escaped to the heartland of bluegrass and ‘sit-ins’.” Henry purred sagaciously: “I made haste to inform Mary of the low type company she was keeping.”

“And?”

“There’s the ‘rub’. Surfer. Our Mary misinterpreted the meat of my missive and drove me from her pad.” Henry snarled, showing a length of scalloped tongue and worn down teeth. “And now I’m on the foul

list. I’ll stay there too, until I can convince her that Beau Atlas is a mangy cur.”

“So go on.”

“Well, I didn’t stop there, as you can see. A little birdie informed me that Atlas lapsed into trauma at the mere whiff of a hostile dog. Upon receipt of that info wheels began to turn. It had been my intention, by the way, to call him out *au natural*; show him up in front of the fair McGonigle, so to speak. . . But stripped to his flannels he hits twenty while I barely tip a hundred with a stem of bananas under my arm. He would hardly be afraid of me in the original.”

“Great God,” I said. “You’re so right.”

“Well that’s when I decided to sit in on a few meetings of the Order of Isis in Amon. They’re a great gang. You know they have a female neophyte, second class, who spends her Sundays in the L.A. Zoo disguised as an orangoutang. It’s a windfall, she says, for the coming recession.”

I got up and went to the window to let in some of the morning smog. If you don’t know what that is I suggest you query the Florida Chamber of Commerce.

“Get on with it, Henry,” I said. With the coming of daylight he was visibly nervous. He paced the floor on all four pads.

“So I hit upon this rig.” He waved a paw expressively. “It’s done with

a couple of frog's legs, two jiggers of julep, and a handful of castor beans arranged geometrically within the confines of a pentagon and a star, drawn in the dirt; all under the first quarter of the moon. I did the whole thing last night, in back of the Griffith Planetarium. . . You should have seen me, Surfer, I had to wear a pair of goat horns while dancing a sort of Egyptian conga."

I sighed. No sleep and twenty-four hours of whiskers hadn't helped my disposition. "All right, Henry," I said. "You've sold me. You're a werewolf. You're a dog. You're strictly canine. Spell it out. Where do I come in?"

"Well, as stated, I had first intended doing the whole thing myself. I was going to charge out of the bushes and gum Atlas' *derriere*, so that he would flee down the full length of Laurel Canyon beneath the scornful gaze of La McGonigle."

"But?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Right. Nothing."

"Why?"

"Because," Henry rose on tip-toe and bayed to the rising sun, "that female 'borgia' friend of Marys, Lucy Beemaster, sailed off to San Diego and farmed out her pet greyhound to Mary. Now I'm afraid to go anywhere near the damned place."

"You're afraid of dogs?"

"Cats, too."

"And that's where I come in?"

"That's right, Surfer."

"Great God," I said.

"Tonight's the night," Henry continued. "Mary has a date with Atlas—and," his voice took on sepulchral tones, "if I don't get the job done and get back up on the hill in back of the Planetarium in time for the end of the quarter of the full moon, I'll have to stay this way for a month."

"HMMMMMMMM!" I said.

"All you have to do is to take care of that damn greyhound. Her name's Marybelle. She usually sits on the porch until La McGonigle comes home."

"If Atlas is allergic to dogs, why not let Marybelle do the trick?" I threw off my bathrobe, walked into the washroom and adjusted the shower. Henry followed me.

"Mary can control the greyhound. It's not that easy."

"O.K." I said from inside the shower. "I'll hogtie Marybelle, and you can begin yodelling in the bushes."

Henry's reply was lost in the sound of rushing water. I soaped up and rubbed around. This was, by far, the screwiest deal I had ever had the misfortune to be connected with. It had dawned on me, however, during Henry's dialogue, that I could perhaps exploit the deal for my own ends. After all, McGonigle *had* been mine. So why not again? I had lost her through the stupid mistake of having laughed raucously at the so-

called exploits of Mary's uncle, Richard Harding Stavis—four times removed. To her that guy was the essence of journalism and hot-shot reporting. He was a free-lancer who traveled from war to war with a ball-point, a quart of absinth, and a ten cent note-book.

I had had the audacity to accuse him of stealing the greater part of his copy from the files of the Christian Science Monitor. . . That was the end. She had removed her sugary substance from the confines of my feebly grasping fingers and smote me with volumn twenty-four of the Encyclopedia Britannica. Since that unhappy occasion I had caught only surreptitious peeps of La McGonigle from behind the safe thicknesses of palm trees, street lamps, and sundry telephone poles.

After a brisk rub I returned to the front room and Henry. I held up two fingers. "I dig," I said. "I shall appear in the scene, McGonigle-Birch. You stay here for the day. I'll make your excuses at the office, and I shall proceed to work my wiles. There's raw hamburger in the re-frig."

"Just keep me posted," Henry said. He had managed a cigarette from my pack. And he looked most fruity with it sticking out of his puckered lips. I lit it for him.

"I'll ring you," I said

In a matter of minutes I was dressed and out of the house. I

picked up my battered Renault from the garage and headed off to the happy playground of Geisenholdt Publications.

The Renault was in good shape. I cruised up Vine Street, down Hollywood Boulevard, and over to North Wilcox. It was great to be alive! The smog wasn't *too* thick. It was green and purple today, in contrast to the usual bilge-brown. I could almost see the hills just a few hundred yards away; The sun tried hard but it was useless. It gleamed like a jaundiced tennis ball.

I had breakfast before I trekked off to Geisenholdts on the Sunset-strip. My five feet of office space was just three yards from Mary's five feet, and 9:00 o'clock was blast-off time.

Did I say that McGonigle was beautiful? Did I?. . . Well I take it back. She was *etherial*, actually. She was *ectoplasm*. She was a *girl* fairy right out of the 'Crock of Gold'. Even now, when she was bugged to the eyeballs with layout work for the Mastic Brassiere contract. Just to be in the proximity of all that pulchritude sent flashes of menopausal waves through the twisted matrix of my simple nervous system. After all, as it says on my dog-tag, I am but a simple man with blue eyeballs and the usual amount of pedal digits.

I had plotted deeply during the drive over. And I had come up with

a lulu. It took me all of fifteen minutes to attract Mary's attention. I'm not addicted to spit-balls and rubber bands would invite reprisal. I finally managed a note to her with the aid of a septugenarian copy boy. Atlas was four desks away. He sneered at me. I smirked at him and gave with a faggy wave of the hand.

The note read: PUMPKIN! MUST SEE YOU DURING COFFEE PERIOD IN-RE YOUR UNCLE, R.H. STAVIS.

I watched her nervously while she perused the missive. She caught my eye and nodded her pretty, vacuous head. I beamed and Atlas frowned darkly. Time rolled by until someone blew the whistle for camels and coffee. I trotted out to the few feet of greensward that graces the front of mighty Geisenholdts.

Once there, I sat down to wait. Even now, I knew, the worm of curiosity was gnawing at her feminine innards. I had hardly settled to a reclining position and shielded my eyes from the sun, when a musical voice—with a slightly brassy edge said, "Well?"

I turned my head. My nose brushed a pair of dainty feet with shoes to match. I looked up. It was Mary. "Hi!" I said.

"What's the meaning of this silly note, Surfer?" She held the slip of paper in her hand. "If this is another of your mean old tricks, I'll—I'll."

"You'll what? Baby." I made what is known as a *moue* at her.

"Well I'll just have Atlas make you stop annoying me."

I sat up abruptly. "Hold it, Pumpkin," I said. "No need for mayhem in the curricula. Not that I'm afraid of that 'muscles-beach' grapefruit. I've heard he's even afraid of—dogs."

She sneered loyally. Her cute little lip did a half flip.

"What information could *you* have about *my* uncle?"

"Oh, hell! You know damn well he's not your real uncle. No one can have an uncle four-times-removed."

She seated herself beside me. And, being conditioned, I began to drool, quietly but steadily.

"I explained the whole thing to you once before," she said. "There's no need to go into it again."

I remembered her explanation all too well. She had drawn the diagram of a family tree. And at the time, what with the help of a slide-rule and the naughty affair of a maiden aunt, it *had* looked convincing.

"All right! *All Right!*" I said. "So he's your uncle. Anyhow this *uncle* is in town on a short visit, a three-day stopover. He's on his way to Babushkistan, the hot-spot in the Hindu Kush." I watched her narrowly. Her eyes lit up and her pretty mouth made a round 'O', just built for popsickles.

"Uncle Richard is coming here?"

"Right, Pumpkin. And you, my sweet, will be in on the ground

floor for an interview; that article you've always wanted to do. He's a natural."

She really bought it, I could smell the tallow sizzling. I was *in*, but way in. And if ferocious Henry could manage but one convincing bark, Atlas Birch would absolutely and irrevocably be low man on the proverbial pole. . .

"Will you help me, Surfer?" Her hand moved to my shirt front smoothing my collar. I had her, but good. I'm the lad who handles local advertising. And I know every bourbon-nosed editor in the business.

"Of course, Honey-Pot." I spoke in the grand style. "Only to glad to lend a hand. How about tonight? We'll draw up a list of questions and stuff like that."

"But I couldn't, tonight."

"And why not?" I asked. My voice was snappingly brittle.

"Well, you know—I've promised Atlas. I simply *couldn't* break a date just like that."

"O.K., Pumpkin—" I got up. "Tell you what. I'll get some stuff together and drop it off about 11:30 tonight. You'll be coming home then. We'll go over the material together. Tomorrow is Saturday and you can sleep late. How does that grab you?"

"Well—I don't know what Atlas will say—"

"Babee! Forget Atlas. A growing girl must look to her future. And Mary—" I became of a sudden

warm, sweaty, and masculine.

"Yes?"

"Well, nothing now. But you'll do it, O.K.? Tonight at eleven-thirty."

"All right," she agreed. "But Atlas might be with me."

"Not for long," I muttered,

"What did you say?"

"Nothing," I assured her hastily.

"Hey! I understand you have a dog up there. Will it be all right. I mean will we bother each other if I wait on the porch?"

McGonigle got up and smoothed her mini-skirt. "That's Lucy Bee-master's greyhound, Marybelle, and she's sweet and nice. She wouldn't bite a flea."

I got up too. Coffee time was over. My lay-out work was through. I had an appointment with a local chain bakery for the calorie column. "I got to run," I said softly. "I'll see you tonight."

"Goodbyeee, Surfer."

The music of her voice followed me as I tripped over the greensward, clicking my heels at three second intervals.

At exactly ten-thirty I was perched on the McGonigle veranda awaiting the finale of this script-writer's nightmare. The whole thing was stupidly impossible I kept telling myself. Somewhere along the line the old grey-matter had slipped a notch. The Metamorphosis of Henry Thorndyke was but a minute manifestation of what could happen if I

didn't leg it to the analyst in short order.

During the afternoon I had had visions of myself in insulin shock to chase the werewolves away. It had unnerved me to the point where I had hastily called Henry. I was truly grateful for his answering bark. At this very moment Henry was staked out beneath a few Eucalyptus trees bordering the short walk to Mary's house from the drive below.

"Quiet, Marybelle," I said sternly. Oddly enough the greyhound had been delighted to see me. And, I suspected, she was aware of the presence of Henry in the trees below. From time to time a most peculiar glazed look would film her eyes, and her tiny ears would weave back and forth in rhythm to the gurgling grunts she was making with now. . . They weren't aggressive gurgles. I knew that much at least. But to hell with it. I had other problems.

Homes in Laurel Canyon—or in any of the canyons leading up from the Sunset-strip—are of similar construction. Not in the architectural sense, but in the method of approach.

A small corps of engineers and a bulldozer are first needed to carve an 'approach' to the site of the manse. *It*, of course, will be situated on a flat bit of terrain hacked out of the side of a mountain. The houses invariably overlook each other. For those *sans* the where-withal to afford the bulldozer, a

rope ladder has been known to suffice. The McGonigle was strictly in the bulldozer category.

The night sounds were beginning to reach me. I trembled with spasmodic palpitations at the awareness of the approach of 'zero hour'. I kept telling myself the whole thing was a dream; that it hadn't happened; that there was no Henry Thorndyke hidden in the bushes.

But he was all too real.

I had taken him to Schwietzer's Spa on Gower Gulch during the late afternoon. I had harbored hopes he would disappear after my third gin and tonic. But he hadn't. In fact, to my disgust he had wheedled a chain of highballs by the display of idiot tricks to the befuddled menage.

"Thorndyke!" I had shouted, after his sixth (he was juggling a gaboon on the end of his slobbering muzzle). "Desist! You have no shame."

"I do this," Henry grumbled before all and sundry, "because you, Ed Aines, are the absolute in cheapness." Half way through his oration I began to move my lips. "Ventriloquism," I exclaimed in a high falsetto. I was slightly hysterical.

They weren't convinced, I could tell. Three, who were able to ambulate, left hurriedly. The rest stared into space. I grabbed Henry's leash and left too. In the doorway Henry turned and burped and gnashed his teeth, a la Lon Chaney Jr.

I sat up, startled. Down below I had heard the soft purr of a motor and a sound like the application of brakes. This was it. . . Both Marybelle and I were alert, poised on our respective haunches. I gave up a brief prayer for the soul of Henry Thorndyke.

The prosaic sound of feminine giggles were first wafted to us on the night breeze. Then the deep, masculine boom of Atlas Birch. After that there was a short period of an almost profound silence. I mentally pictured them applying themselves to the steep incline of the driveway. I waited, hardly daring to breath;

Nothing happened. I began to count, pretending that I was walking; counting the steps it would take to traverse the drive. The beam of a flashlight became visible. Trust Atlas to be equipped. *And then it came*—Henry, I mean. I froze. So did Marybelle.

Henry's opening gambit was a sort of timid *wuuff*, like the pop of an extra large piece of bubble gum. From the sound of it I knew that somewhere along the line he had lost heart.

There was a delicious feminine squeal. That was Mary McGonigle. There was a loud masculine roar. That, needless to say, was the brute challenge of Atlas Birch. Odd noises came from below; canine bleats of terror and the sound of scuffling in the bushes.

To hell with this sitting! It seemed quite obvious that Henry was getting the worst of it. It was obvious too, that the data on Atlas' 'fear of dogs' had also come a cropper. . . I dashed madly down the hill to the rescue of Henry Thorndyke. Marybelle came with me.

La McGonigle was the absolute picture of the defenceless honey-pot. I approached her on the double. I grabbed her arm, both arms. I grabbed her.

"What's happening?" I had to yell above the sounds of bedlam below.

She gasped for breath: "Down there," she said. "They went that way."

"Then let's go," I said

"It talked, Surfer," Mary stuttered. "It screamed it was Henry Thorndyke." She had my arm and we both stumbled down the hill.

"You're nuts," I said. "What talked? What's this all about?"

"A big dog. Oh, I don't know. I'm all mixed up. Maybe it didn't talk. But it barked at Atlas and tried to bite him. He's chasing it now."

The mayhem continued as we burst out onto the parking area. Atlas' neat convertible was next to my Renault. And, pulling on the door handle of the Renault were the two strong arms of Atlas Birch.

He cursed and yelled. He had the door partially opened and I could

see the canine head of Henry Thorndyke hanging onto the other side with his teeth. The language of Atlas Birch caused the pale face of McGonigle to light up like a stop signal.

"I say there!" I interposed loudly from the edge of the parking strip.

Atlas turned; spotted me over his shoulder. "Ha!" he shouted. "So you're in on this too, Surfer!"

"On what?" I asked. "Look here, Old Man——"

At that moment Atlas gave the door a powerful jerk, and poor Thorndyke was dragged half way out of the Renault. Henry was clinging desperately to the upholstery with his toenails. The resultant cottan batting was flying around like a snowstorm.

"You think I don't know that this is Henry Thorndyke dressed up in a wolf skin, Buby? Well let me tell you, Surfer, old boy, I'm going to take that wolf skin and shove it down your skinny throat." Atlas shouted all this above the din of battle. By this time poor Henry was out in the dirt with his tail between his legs, groaning in terror.

I stood back aghast. The idea of Henry Thorndyke being shoved down my throat left me somewhat numb.

I turned to Mary. "Atlas is stoned," I said.

"Yes," she agreed. "He certainly is." She was in the 'Zombie' state, too. This whole mad caprice had brought her to her dimpled knees.

"SURFER!" Henry shrieked from under the car. "For God's sake do something. HELP ME!" He had crawled there for protection, and the berserk Atlas was whacking at him with an Eucalyptus branch.

I threw caution to the zephyrs; attributing that moment of madness to the long line of hot-blooded peasantry from whom I'm descended.

I sprang with an almost feline agility upon the broad back of Atlas Birch. I clutched his golden locks with both hands. That was about the last I remember. He arose in his wrath and bonged me a couple, so that I collapsed like a smitten forest giant. Before darkness fell I had time to see Marybelle leap—not at poor, quivering Thorndyke, as one would expect—but at the exposed and beautifully rounded *tush* of Atlas Birch;

Then it was all over—birdies and stars. When I awoke my head was cradled in the perfumed lap of Mary McGonigle. She was patting my brow and weeping copious pearls.

"What happened?" I questioned feebly.

Mary said softly: "Just lie back and be quiet for a few minutes. They are gone."

I sat up. "Where did they go?"

"Well, that mean Atlas kicked Marybelle. Then Marybelle bit him again. Then she and the other dog ran off down the canyon" Then I told Atlas that I never wanted to

see him again."

She caught her breath, leaned over and planted a couple of soft lips just below my swollen nose. Seconds passed. Then she broke contact. . . "And now," she said, with business-like tones and a display of feminine logic, "if you feel better, we'll forget all about this silly business and work on my interview with Uncle Stavis."

"Later, Baby," I said. "Right now I got a date with a dog in back of the Planetarium. Come on!"

She came meekly. We entered the Renault and drove to the top of Western Avenue and to the road that winds around the hills to the Planetarium site. It was an exceptionally clear night. The moon—a first-quarter one—shown beautifully until dawn. But Henry Thorndyke never kept his date with the Pentagon.

It was the last night, too. So he said. Now he would have to wait a full month.

So that was it. I took Mary home and life was once more delightful. The interview with R.H.S.

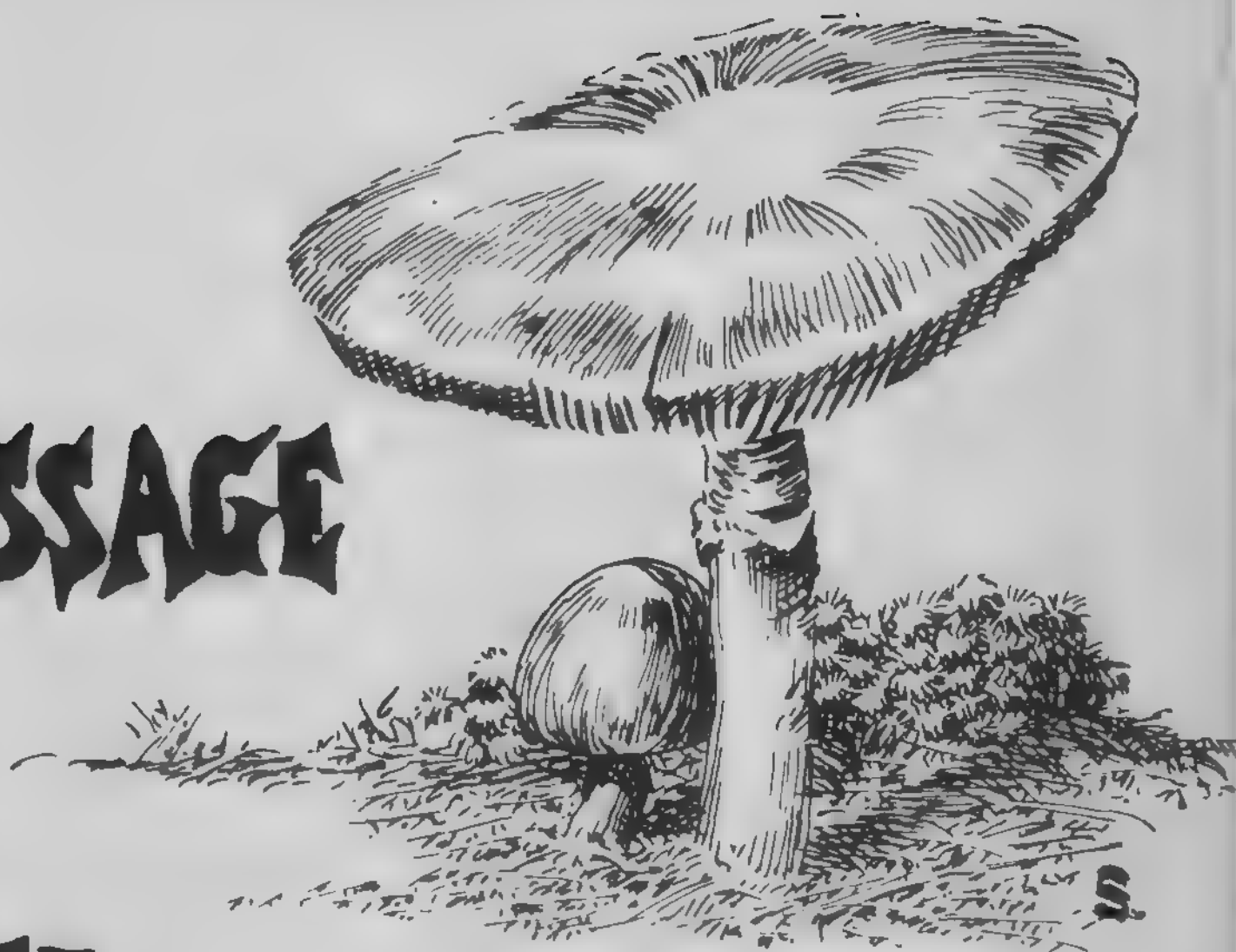
went off as planned. This automatically gave me the key to the McGonigle manse, plus McGonigle. But Henry? Well, I'm worried about him. You see, even though I've put down the somewhat turgid story that Atlas Birch tells around the office, his disappearance is still difficult to explain.

He's back now, all right, But almost a full four weeks went by before he came scratching at my door. He's living with me. He won't talk much. He just sits around smoking my cigarettes and eating the left-overs.

Tomorrow night is the first quarter moon again. And Henry can return to normal. But, as I've said, I'm worried. I haven't the heart to tell him the 'secret' that Mary whispered to me just yesterday. Perhaps he's innocent. Maybe he's not to blame. But the thing sure bothers me. You see, in a few short months, Marybelle the greyhound will become the mother of a litter of lovely little puppies— At least I hope, in fact I *pray* that they'll be puppies. ●

SUBSCRIBE—COVEN 13

A MESSAGE FOR BROTHER



By John Lipford

Illustrated by William Stout

A short journey in black and white; with all the elements of the modern gothic in suspense and denouement. A journey, we might add, whose end product could chill your marrow.

I didn't know how long I'd been sleeping, at first, when I awoke suddenly and lay there staring into the sable darkness. I couldn't remember anything in fact, not even my name. But slowly, slowly, a few details came back and, to check what I remembered, I put my hands up. Sure enough, the ceiling was there less than an arm's length away, and it

called to mind when I was a child sleeping in the top bunk of the bunk bed I shared with brother. To sleep in the top bunk was very desirable (why, I don't recall, since it was an inconvenient place to sleep, what with having to climb up there on a ladder and being always afraid to fall out) and brother and I took turns sleeping there—one night I

A MESSAGE FOR BROTHER

the next night he.

One evening we differed over whose turn it was to sleep in the top bunk. I *knew* it was my turn, but brother and I quarelled and, through his obstinate stupidity, our discussion degenerated to blows. Mother came in, and to settle the matter flipped a coin. Brother won. So smiling smugly he climbed into the top bunk and under Mother's eyes I took the lower. You can imagine how angry I was, *knowing* he'd robbed me of my right. And when mother left the room I began kicking at the bulge formed in the mattress by brother's rump. He would shift and hiss down at me to stop or he'd beat me up, and I would kick him again and he would hiss again, like the stupid goose he was.

This went on for perhaps an hour; finally he climbed down and after punching me in the ribs said "Go ahead baby, take it if you want it so much."

I did.

You might think it surprising that brother, who was older and bigger than I, would give in so easily. But he knew me. He knew I was capable of lying there all night, without sleep, each minute relentlessly kicking him in the rump. He could have beaten me black and blue and I would still have continued to kick him—and he knew it. When I know I am right, I am implacable.

Anyway, as I have said, after

awakening I lay there in that thick dark, trying to recall some more of myself. I had a vague sense of *weight* on my mind: as if I had some unfinished business to do, or as if I had some message to deliver, or had come to some conclusion or made some decision, and couldn't recall it, though knowing it to be very important. This is an uncomfortable feeling; especially for me—I'm what doctors call 'high strung' or nervous. And when I finally make up my mind that there is something to do, I become very nervous unless I do it *at once*, no matter how long I might have put it off before my decision.

I've always been that way.

So you can imagine how I felt, lying there *knowing* there was something I had decided to do, yet unable to recall what. At length, after vainly trying to win back sleep, I slid out of the head of my bed and put it down, softly, taking care not to awaken those sleeping near me. Granted that this wasn't likely, but still, I had been brought up to be considerate—not like some people I could mention. I turned over, wriggled out by walking my hands on the pavement. I put one naked foot down with a slight tap, then the other. I crouched there a moment on all fours, shivering.

For it was cold in there. The air was gelid, the pavement frigid. My very bones felt like iced brass. They don't heat those places at all,

and they're quite as cold as the grave. Well, I tried to straighten up, but I was stiff: my joints felt locked in their sockets; I could hardly move, and I had to kneel down and crawl on that cold, cold floor til my bones loosened. With the best will in the world to keep silent, I still made a terrible clatter so that as I crawled I told myself: "You are just going to have to get up and walk or you will certainly awaken the others." And with that self-admonishment, I did.

But it took an effort of will.

As I stood there, a near-amnesiac, naked in that dark cold, I decided that I had to get out. And, being naked, I had to cover myself. You might think my modesty a shade quaint, but I've always been modest. Even my wife has never seen me naked. I reached into my bed and found a coarse sheet there—bedding was not provided in quantity, I must say—which I threw over my head and shoulders, clutching it around my throat with a hand.

Now I could get out.

I thought that once I'd slid out from where I'd been sleeping, and became accustomed to the dark, I would be able to see a door rimmed by a crack of light. But, though I strained my eyesockets I could see nothing. I concluded that it was night. Having no matches or lighter, I was forced to bump around until I found the entrance. I had some idea of the lay of the place, because

I vaguely recalled having visited it once in daytime. My only fear was that the door might be locked. That would prove an embarrassment.

My prison—you would certainly call it that—was a small unfurnished windowless rectangular room, made of some hard smooth cold material such as concrete or stone. On one side was the wall with our sleeping niches; on the other an unrailed stair consisting of five steps leading up to an iron door. I guessed it to be iron because it emitted a metallic sound at the scratching of my finger tips. I stood in front of it, my heart in my mouth, wondering if, when I tried to open it, I would find it unlocked.

As I exerted all my will that it be unlocked, I suddenly remembered standing outside brother's door, the time he had rheumatic fever. We had been ice-skating on a frozen river not far from our house, staying on the thick ice near its banks. I decided to skate farther out. I edged toward the center, hearing the ice crackle and pop menacingly around me. But, being small and light I—I've always been skinny and rather sickly, though I never got any sympathy for it—made it across without incident. When I reached the opposite shore, big husky healthy brother called out: "Is it safe?"

"Perfectly safe," I replied.

He came skating across at great

speed, to great a speed to stop when he heard the ice snapping beneath him. Just as he crossed the center of the river the ice split with a sharp report and down he plunged into the chill water. He made a great splash. Poor, stupid, brother, I thought.

It was just luck for him that two other skaters appeared to drag him out. I was too small at the time to do anything more than to wring my hands and watch him drown. Anyway, we got him home but he caught a chill, and then rheumatic fever. For awhile there was a chance he would die. At the crises of his illness I stood outside his closed bedroom door, willing him to die. He was mother and father's favorite, being elder son. If he had died I would have been the favorite.

The only child, in fact.

As luck would have it he didn't die. His disease, however, left him forever after with a bad heart. From then on he had to be very careful not to run or to play hard or even to undergo sudden shocks—though leaping at him from behind the staircase with a loud "BOO!" was not, I discovered, enough to kill him.

Brother and I were *always* playing little jokes on each other. Once, before his illness, while he was playing with his chemistry set, he offered me a teaspoon of a white granular substance. Suspiciously, I tasted it with my tongue and found it

sweet. "Is it sugar?" I asked.

"It's sweet, isn't it?" My brother grinned.

I gulped the whole teaspoonful. Shortly afterward I vomited. Brother laughed and laughed as I retched because, as he told me between chortles, he had fooled me with a teaspoonful of sugar of lead. Lead acetate. Fortunately, my young stomach rejected most of the raw dose, and the only after-effect was that, a few days after this witless joke, all my hair fell out. It grew back in though, finally. Curiously, some still remains.

After his tragic illness, all he was allowed to do was to stay inside and play with his chemistry set, or from time to time to walk in the woods with mother while he pursued his botanical studies. Things were, from my point of view, even worse than they had been before, for now mother and father favored him more than ever. They continued to, in fact, right up until we were so abruptly orphaned. But everybody has always loved brother more than me.

Sometimes, I suspected that even my wife preferred him to me.

Well, back to me standing in front of that iron door. Stronger than ever I had this feeling of unfinished business, and now, now I knew more: it had popped into my mind that it had to do with brother. If the door would open, I could go to him and find out what that un-

finished business was. Perhaps I would even recall on my way to him. Anyway, after standing in front of the door for several minutes in the most *perfect* silence, I gathered my courage and scrabbled around on it for a handle.

There wasn't any!

The door was just a riveted plane surface. Panicked, I felt all over it once more, but there was definitely no handle. I stepped back and scratched my head, trying to think; it made too much noise though, and I stopped. But I'd had a thought: I put both hands flat against the door and pushed.

Imagine my joy and relief when, with an anguished *scream* of rusted hinges, the door gave and, with a bit more effort, opened to reveal sky and stars and trees and grass! I had feared never to see them again.

It was night, all right. And a moonless night, too, which explained why I hadn't seen a crack of light around the door. I stood awhile in the fresh clear air, looking at the panorama. A distance beyond a wall and a line of cypresses I saw apartment houses with most of their windows darkened. From time to time I heard the zoom of a car passing by and saw its lights trace eerie designs along the top of the wall as they filtered through the trees. I looked behind me and saw the iron door agape. I closed it, as softly and silently as I could, so that the others might not catch a cold from

the draft.

I drew my sheet closely around me, and walked down a rock-strewn path. My feet were so numb from the cold that I felt no pain as the sharp gravel cut into them. It occurred to me that it would never do for the guard to hear me. He would certainly raise an alarm. So I stepped to the grass and walked silently, crushing the little fat succulent blades, and staining my nice white feet with their greenness.

It was very pleasant.

I paralleled the path until I came to the wall. It was of irregular stone blocks, quite high, perhaps two feet higher than I could reach. It amused me to see what a lot of trouble they go to, to ensure that we stay inside. But, to will is to be able. And since I wanted very badly to be outside that wall, I knew that I would find a way over it, or through it, or beneath it. I was not dismayed. I stood in front of it for awhile, then decided to mount a direct assault in the hope that my digits would find a purchase in the seams between the stones.

I launched myself at it, scrabbling at the rock with fingers and toes, making a terrible racket; I fell down, nearly losing my sheet, then launched myself again. Again I fell, making a noise like a pile of dry sticks being rattled. And, as I was getting up, preparing for another try, I heard the crunch of footsteps on gravel. A voice called out: "Here! Here! What's

goin on over there?"

A flashlight beam waggled about. I hid myself behind a convenient upright stone. The beam waggled some more. A hoarse voice said: "God-damned kids!" and there was a squeak of hinges as of a gate being opened. The guard must have thought that someone was trying to get in! As I crouched behind the flat stone watching the flashlight beam reflect along the top of the wall from the other side, I laughed and laughed to myself at the guard for thinking anyone would want to get in!

It occurred to me, however, that here was my opportunity to get out! The gate was open and the guard was outside looking for people trying to get in. Quickly, I rose, scuttled on tip-toes as silently as I could across the gravel to the gate and poked my head out. The guard was still on the other side. I stole through the gate, skulked along the wall in the opposite direction to the corner, slipped behind it and straightened up. I was free! I was outside at last!

Now I could visit brother!

There were still, however, a few problems: I had to avoid people. I was, after all, dressed only in a sheet. I was conspicuous to say the least—and I wasn't absolutely certain where I was. True, I had been here once before, carrying the other two, in fact.....Oh, I was remembering now. But that had been so many

years ago. The direction I should take remained vague. I knew, though, that if I wandered for awhile in familiar precincts, I could then find brother's house.

There remained, too, the trifling problem of what I was to see brother *about*. But I was sure that I would soon recall that, too.

I slunk along the wall, pierced the line of cypresses, and found myself on the bank of a frozen river; across which, I could see the streets and apartments of the city. A large building some distance down the shore—not really an apartment—seemed somehow familiar. The more I looked at it the more familiar it became. I knew I had a clue. If I could cross that river and get to that building I knew I would see something on it that would help me recall just why I wanted to visit brother.

If I *walked* across the river, however, and the ice broke—*finis*; for I had never learned to swim. The alternative was the bridge a few hundred yards away. But cars passed over the bridge. And, as I have explained, I preferred to remain unseen.

So I had but one choice: to cross both the ice *and* my fingers. One thing, however, the river made everything fall into place as to where I was. I needed only to follow its banks and I would shortly be near the road to brother's house. It was the same river brother and I had ice-

skated on when we were children.

Brother's house had been the family home. When mother and father died, brother inherited it, along with most of their estate. I received a disappointing share because, as father lectured me in the will; "I remind my younger son that, as his brother is a semi-invalid and cannot work, it is only just that he receive the major portion of our property. Especially do I think this just when it is owing to his malice that his brother's heart was gravely weakened."

Brother was a tattle-tale too.

Poor mother and father. They both died the same night, the doctor said of heart attacks brought on by acute indigestion. Brother, unfortunately, escaped with what he called a 'slight indisposition' and the loss of some hair. I supposed at the time that his stomach was strong even though his heart was weak. Only later did I deduce what had happened.

Well. Gingerly I started skating across, edging toward the middle of the river; keeping an ear cocked for the first sound of a crackling. I neared the center, was in the center, and was across, without ever hearing the faintest *pop!* Either the ice had grown thicker than when I was a boy, or my confinement had made me dreadfully skinny.

On the other side I climbed the river bank and walked along it;

lurking in the shadows to avoid being seen by vehicles on the brightly lighted boulevard that flanked it. Presently, I found myself across from that large building I mentioned. I crept close to the road and peered out from behind a thorn bush to read a neon sign above the building's entrance. It said: "Salem Heights Hospital."

It was the hospital where I had been so mortally ill! How could I have forgotten that? I had spent an agonized night there, rolling about on the bed with my bowels burning as if someone had poured molten steel into them; while doctors and nurses scurried to and fro, dosing me, forcing tubes down my gullet, slicing me open.

How could I have forgot?

But I remember it *distinctly* now. Brother had invited me and my wife to dinner that evening. I hadn't particularly wanted to go. Brother and I did *not* get along. But under my wife's urging I went. And, I must confess, I went with some curiosity as to what transparent scheme brother—I was certain he had one—might have in his dull brain this time.

For dinner we had juicy steaks and mushroom sauce, wild mushrooms brother himself had picked. As I have said, brother was quite the little scientist; his favorite hobbies being botany and chemistry. He often delivered long stupid boring lectures on the subtle differen-

ces between the intensely poisonous and the intensely delicious species of the fungi.

He delivered one that night, as an appetizer, I suppose, then ladled me a portion. I said, about to scrape them from my steak, "Yes. But are *these* mushrooms safe?"

"Perfectly safe," Brother replied.

And he plucked one from my plate and ate it.

Desert was a tasty torte that I cleverly avoided. I drank my coffee black and unsweetened, too. Brother seemed in a mood for jokes, though I noted that not once did he leave the room after dinner. Had he done so, I should have too: first to the kitchen for eggwhite, then to the bathroom.

It was a full hour after dinner before I began to feel uncomfortable. It was suddenly as if a red-hot dime had been dropped into my stomach. I complained of this to brother and my wife, saying: I wonder if those mushrooms were safe after all?"

"Nonsense," my wife quickly replied. "You saw your brother and I eat the same mushrooms; you're just having one of your nervous attacks."

"Clearly," I said—and perhaps I spoke with the tongue of one inspired—"we did *not* eat the *same* mushrooms. Perhaps brother made a tragic mistake and plucked a poisonous one which, by sheerest accident, made its way to my plate."

"Impossible," brother said. "Have

I not told you that even one *Amanita Phalloides*—the only possible lethal mushroom which I could mistake for an *Amanita Caesarea*—would poison the batch? You are simply too highly strung. Your nerves make you overly suspicious.

They

ed down at me while the dime grew to a quarter, then to a fifty-cent piece, then to a white-hot silver dollar. They smiled at me, reassured me, while I writhed on the couch and screamed: Get a doctor. Get me a doctor for God's sake!" But they just continued to smile and to reassure me while I lay dying—for at the time I quite felt I was dying—until finally I fainted.

Before I lost consciousness I recall my wife saying to brother: "What do you think?" And brother replied: "I think we should call a doctor; though it seems that it's much too late for that." Brother paused. "Indeed, I fear I have made a most tragic mistake." He was smiling.

And *that* is why I am walking along this road now, going to see brother; I have a very particular message to give him. Isn't it strange? After three years of unconscious brooding, I have awakened in the middle of the night with this urge to go to brother. I shall stand over his bed, I think, and jiggle it slightly. When he awakens, I shall tell him I have figured it out: I believe he

plucked one *Phalloides* (so very like delicious *Caesarea* even an expert could make a mistake—tragic, tragic), sauteed it separately in the best of butter, and placed it on top of the others in the sauce. You must admit the ingeniousness of the scheme. It has a nice subtlety I should never have dreamed him capable of. One would almost think he'd had help.

There is hardly any traffic on this road; when I see the lights of a car I retreat into the trees that line it. Otherwise I swing along it, my footfalls like hammerblows on the concrete. Ahead now I see brother's house, and shortly I shall be able to deliver my message... .

I am at the gate looking up at the house. Ah, memories, memories. They come flooding back. For instance, I recall that the day after brother's twenty-first birthday anniversary celebration, mother and father were carried out feet first right through this very gate. Perhaps that sweet cake with its thick sugary icing was too heavy for their poor old stomachs. Heavy as lead, I should imagine, though I don't know: I stayed in my room that night, refusing to share in any celebration of another year of brother's life.

Ah me. I cannot deny I was warned. I should never have eaten a dinner with brother. *Never underestimate a brother.* Not when he has an intimate acquaintance with mineral poisons and lethal fungi. I must say though that his tech-

nique improved over the years: in my case he took no risk at all.

He had only to *pretend* he had vomited.

"Poor Will," I imagine him saying to a suspicious coroner, "his stomach was always so sensitive. He warned me and his poor wife of my terrible error just in time—for us." And, perhaps, brother broke down.

I have opened the gate, carefully, silently, and am through it. I am walking up the sidewalk to brother's front door. Shall I ring? Shall I knock? No, I think it better to remain with my original plan: I shall find an open window, creep through, and *surprise* brother. That is still the best plan. I shall do that.

This window closed, this window closed, this one closed, this one. . . . Ah! This one is unlocked! Slide it up carefully now. . . there. . . we are. Now, through, silently, silently. What a great surprise it will be for brother to see me, after a three year absence!

Dark as a tomb here in the front room. Can't see a thing. I should like to turn on a light. But penurious brother might waken and rush down to turn it off. And I want to creep softly, silently up the stairs to stand at the foot of his bed, so that he will see me when he wakens. . .

Damn it! I've tripped over a chair and fallen with a noisy clatter on to the floor. Pick yourself up, stupid, and try to be more quiet. . .

Too late. I hear a voice from a bedroom above.

"Who's there?"

That is brother's voice; I would know it anywhere. He sounds a bit frightened.

"W-who's there?"

It is I, brother—*I* am calling—your brother, Will, returned after these three years absence. Won't you welcome me with open arms?

"Who's there, I say?"

Brother must not have heard me. No vocal cords—a defect I had neglected. No matter. He'll get my message.

Here he comes; I can see a flashlight beam glancing down the stairs as I go up them to meet him, my arms spread wide to hug him. This will be almost as big a surprise as the one I had planned. There's the light, glancing about on the walls, the stairs, on me. . . notice? Most of it goes right through me and the sheet to shed a curious barred pattern on the wall behind.

"My God! Dear God!"—That's brother, shrieking. Don't shriek brother. Don't you recognize your own

brother, gone these three years?

Brother has stopped shrieking as I stalk toward him, though his mouth is still open. A stream of bloody spittle dribbles from its corners. Oh! Now he has fallen. The flashlight is tumbling down the stairs, its beam playing about insanely, and brother is tumbling too. Step aside. Ah! There goes brother. *He got my message.* But seeing me after this long separation was too great a shock for his poor heart, I suppose.

A pity.

What to do? I'd put my hands in my pockets and think, if a shroud had. . . A woman's voice? From above? Whose voice is that? It's very familiar.

"Harold?" she's quavering. "Harold?"

Whose voice is that? Why is it so familiar?

"Harold? What's happened? Why did you scream like that? H-Harold?"

It's my *wife's* voice! How could I have forgot it? No matter. I have the odd sensation that *she'll want to hear my message too.* . . ●

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Stout '89



DOUBLE HEX

By Samuel M. Clawson

Illustrated by William Stout

Pennsylvania has always rivalled New England in the art of spells, enchantments, and 'garden' witchcraft. It's a way of life, actually, for many of the people. It's also a highly COMPETITIVE way of life.

High summer in the Pennsylvania foothills often brings an oppressive humidity even in the coolest hours. It was already stuffy in the little bedroom under the eaves where Amanda Spiegell crouched in the light of a guttered candle, waiting for the dawn to make the cock crow. He was in a slatted box on the roof of the kitchen shed where he could see

the low rise of Gobbler's hill to the east of Hummerstown.

She listened intently for any sound of her brother, Reuben, stirring in the second floor bedroom directly beneath. If he guessed the cock was there, he'd surely know that she meant to strike at dawn when the tide of life is at full ebb, and he'd lay the cock still with his

DOUBLE HEX

hex spell. The message in the tea leaves had been clear enough. A death in the family before the dark of the moon was done. There were only her and Reuben locked in the dark battle of hex and spell. The stark pattern in the bottom of the divining cup had warned her that the climax was at hand.

A faint grayness relieved the dead black of the window pane at the foot of her bed. The window was raised several inches at the bottom and the soft shuffle of spreading wings against the sides of the cage came to her ears. She crouched lower, bending over the floor. Her forefingers darted downward and inscribed an intricate sign as the cock began the first discordant notes of his call.

"Oh, brother, devil brother," she spat out the words. "Fade, pale, choke, smother. Fall, crawl, lie, die."

A muffled snort from the bedroom below interrupted the last notes of the cock's crow. Amanda remained bent over listening. She gasped with delight when a thumping crash shook the old structure of the house. Then, as she half rose from her cramped position, knife-like pain stabbed into her back.

The sound she made was an animal compound of surprise and fury. She knew that somehow he had made a doll with a part of her in it. Not finger or toe clippings—she was careful about that. Perhaps a hair or two had escaped from the tight fit-

ting house cap she always wore. There was nothing to be done now. Admitting receipt of a hex-blow only strengthened it tenfold. The knife-like pain had only been a cramp from bending over so long. She formed the thought as her defense, wishing grimly that she could believe it. Go down and fix his breakfast. Of course he carried the doll with him. No use looking for it. She had to crush him before he could use it again.

She pulled the stiff black skirt down over her ample hips, hurried into the blouse and tugged the comb through her iron-grey hair. Reuben's bedroom door was open when she came down the steps from the third floor and passed along the hallway. He had turned from the mirror and was watching when she stopped in the door. She remembered when she saw the costume. It was Wednesday morning. Every Wednesday morning he tried on the long scarlet cape and the ugly white headthing with the black flap and eye-holes hanging over his face. She could see his piggy eyes shining behind the black cloth.

"Four eggs, Amanda," he said thickly through the muffling cloth. "And get rid of that damn rooster out there, where ever he came from—made me fall over the chair." She could hear his voice in a diminishing mutter as she went on towards the steps. She felt the old creepy feeling on the nape of her neck and

supposed that he was throwing his hateful hex-chant after her. "Aiya, aiya, simple sister. Boil, burn, break, blister." When he was alive father had never allowed it but Reuben had always found a time and place to whisper it in her ear.

It seemed years instead of six months since they'd put father in the ground. Reuben was the man and a woman has no say. He'd sold the farm and come to town. Rented a house and taken a job in Krause's butcher shop. Built the hex fire around her by day and by night—by chant and by spell. Oh, she knew the reason why. The money from the farm and what father had left in the bank. Reuben loved money. Every bite she ate was a piece of it—she'd seen it in his eyes.

The house was a spook's hold. He claimed to like it because the blind-alley street out in front ducked between Carter's warehouse and the City Garage to let out in the Main Square. He could whip around the corner and be at his job in Krause's Market in five minutes. Or to the Lodge on the other side of the square for an evening. After supper tonight he'd go up to his room, wrap the costume in a piece of butcher paper and go out to the lodge meeting.

She hated the house. Haunt heavy and hex-walled. She thought of her Reuben doll, buried in the yard when it had failed her. The cat she

had brought to set inside the seventh circle while she cast the death spell. He'd put the devil's horns on it with his thumb and two outside fingers. An hour later the cat had wandered out into the street in front of the house and Smeckler's grocery truck had ground the life out of him.

"Good eggs, Amanda," Reuben looked up from his plate. "Why don't you pull up a chair and have some?"

"You know I don't do that," she said in a flat voice, turning from the stove and her puttering with the skillet. "The men eat and then the women. Old custom is good enough for me." She sniffed and went back to scraping at the bottom of the skillet. Why did he always think her a fool? He could put a sign on the egg in the shell or the flour in the bin and no matter. The fire would burn it out at cooking. He would get no chance to see her food between the cooking and the eating. Especially not now with the foot of the reaper already on the door sill.

"The trouble with you, Amanda, you're dumb as an ox," Reuben sucked audibly at the cup of coffee and glanced at her back with a frown on his butcher's face. "Hex is not for the likes of you so stop fooling with it. Some day you'll put the sign on yourself if you don't take care."

"There's no money in the food

jar," she said coldly without looking around. "Will you drop something in or bring some of Krause's horse flesh if you want to eat that."

"We sell good meat,," he scowled at the thought of parting with money. "Besides, I meant to tell you. We close the market for tomorrow. Krause and me are going rabbit hunting while they put the new counters in. Then you can make us a great big hassenpfeffer."

After Reuben had gone she fried eggs and potatoes and sat at the table chewing nervously. Her eyes kept wandering to the wholesale meat company calendar on the far wall. She seldom noticed dates but yesterday she had traced the phases of the moon printed beside each day. In three more days—. She heard the front door open and turned to see Reuben standing by the clothes rack in the hallway.

"Damned rooster," he said gruffly. "Wondering how he got put up there on the roof and forgot my hat."

She sat stiffly in the chair until the front door slammed then lifted a forkfull of egg toward her mouth. Suddenly she drew in a harsh gasping breath. He'd seen the food. Of course the hex was on it. It must be that he too knew the time was near. Wily as a fox—he had almost trapped her. She snatched up the plate, carried it to the garbage pail and scraped it off hastily.

When Amanda straightened up

with the fork and plate still in her hand, her eyes were level with the calendar hanging slightly askew on the wall. Odd, she hadn't known this wednesday was a red-letter holiday. Realization drenched her with the icy shock of startled fear. It was last month's sheet she was seeing. Her hand rose slowly and lifted the old sheet. The plate slipped from her other hand and shattered on the floor. No wonder he had come back. The new moon was due tonight. This was the day of the reaper forecast in the divining cup.

After the dishes were done she went upstairs to make the beds, her mind hunting wildly for a plan. When she pushed Reuben's door open her eyes went first to the table at the foot of the rumpled bed. It was a plain table with a lamp, an ash-tray, and a rack of pipes. She had crocheted the large doily in the middle of the table. The hex sign was worked into it so cleverly that you could only see it by holding the doily up to the light. Sometimes he brushed the doily aside or left it carelessly tossed in the easy chair beside the table where he liked to sit and read. She always put it back to the sign of the devil's horns pointed up across the bed.

This morning the .22 rifle which usually hung on the wall above the bed was lying across the doily. The rifle was freshly oiled. The cleaning rod was leaning against the table and a box of cartridges spilled

open beside the rifle. She looked along the barrel and saw that it pointed at Reuben's picture on the bureau. She came up to the table and reached out to lift the rifle. Then she saw that the doily was turned. She knew where the horns in the hex were by the little stitches she had dropped at the edge by each horn tip. The horns lay on each side of the rifle barrel and bracketed the picture on the bureau.

She drew her hand back without touching the rifle. It was double sign. Strong hex and hard. She made the bed and hurried out of the room. For a while she sat in the kitchen, thinking, weighing, feeling more confident as she reviewed the lay of the hex. After a while she went back into his room and this time noticed that the rifle was loaded and the safety off. For a moment she frowned because this wasn't like Reuben. He was a careful one with a gun. Then she smiled. That was the way with hex. It changed little things—enough.

His dinner was hot in the pans when Reuben came in at five. Instead of going to the stove and lifting the lids, he just stood there for a minute with his face the color of a slab of suet. Then he went up the stairs. She heard him tramping around the bedroom like a caged animal. Then he called down the stairs for her to come up.

"Get me a glass of schnapps."

he said gruffly when she came to the doorway. He was standing in front of the bureau and she could see his hands shaking all the way across the room.

"Just had a hell of an experience. Went over to Krause's house to look at his new gun. Picked the damn thing up and it went off. Clipped through my hair. That close."

Her mind raced while she went down the stairs and poured a glass on the pantry shelf. Oh yes, devil brother. One horn has missed you but the other is loaded too. Right there on the table. She listened unconsciously for the shattering report in the room above.

"Set it down. I'll get it in a minute," he said when she came in with the glass. "First, unload that damn gun, will you? I just noticed, it's loaded too."

It was like a drench of cold water full in her face. How could both horns of a perfect hex have failed? She picked up the rifle and felt the weight of it in her hands. Almost as though by plan, her finger slipped inside the trigger guard and her hand clenched hard—like she had locked fingers uselessly around the neck of the Reuben doll. This time it was different. The rifle barked and ripped back in her hands. Reuben staggered one step and fell back on the bed.

She swayed forward with the rifle still clutched in her hands. In the ruin of his face where the bullet had

found him, Amanda saw victory. She knew his spirit had lifted from him and her thought went flashing to the long knife-like splinter of yew-wood hidden in the bottom of her trunk. She'd saved a gallon of rooster blood to get it from old Granny Merk. Now, drive it through his heart and seal him out of the mortal world forever. She shook her head. It wouldn't do in this case with people coming and all. Anyway, he was the dumb ox—not her. Like mortal, like spirit—he'd never find his way back. She laid the rifle on the table and went down the stairs. A few minutes later she called the police.

It was an hour later and she was rocking back and forth in the old parlor rocker. The front door was open and the place was full of them. Dean, the plain clothes Chief, the coroner, two patrol car men in uniform, and a Herald reporter. As usual, Dean was talking.

"Damndest thing I ever heard of. He picked up one gun over at Krause's place and shot a furrow through his hair. Then he comes home, picks

up another, and bingo. You shouldn't have picked up the gun though, Miss Speigell," he frowned at Amanda. "Besides disturbing the evidence, you mighta shot yourself. The rest of the clip was still in there."

She looked up from her hands twisted together in the folds of the apron she was wearing and saw the flash of color in the doorway. The squat figure wrapped in the long scarlet cape, the white hooded head, and the black face mask with the little piggy eyes shining behind it.

"Reuben," her voice shrilled in the earache range. "Oh, damn you. I should have used the splinter." She slid down into a moaning blubber.

One of the patrol men jerked his pistol from its holster and the masked man hastily pushed his hood back and showed his face. Everyone recognized Bill Stern, the shoe shop proprietor.

"What's going on here?" Stern asked plaintively. "I just dropped over to ask about Reuben. Saw him sitting in his chair at the meeting. He was pale as a ghost and when I looked again, he'd vanished. ●

The Wonders of the Invisible World:
Being an Account of the

TR Y A L S

OF

Several Witches,

Lately Executed in

NEW-ENGLAND:

And of several remarkable Curiosities therein Occurring.

Together with,

- I. Observations upon the Nature, the Number, and the Operations of the Devils.
- II. A short Narrative of a late outrage committed by a knot of Witches in *Swede-Land*, very much resembling, and so far explaining, that under which *New-England* has laboured.
- III. Some Counsels directing a due Improvement of the Terrible things lately done by the unusual and amazing Range of Evil-Spirits in *New-England*.
- IV. A brief Discourse upon those Temptations which are the more ordinary Devices of Satan.

By COTTON MATHER.

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BELL, BOOK AND TAROT



by Jean Cirrito

We will attempt in this and ensuing columns to explore the world of the occult in all its forms: Witchcraft, Sorcery, Lycanthropy, Druidic lore, spells, enchantments, the 'Evil eye.' All manner of phenomena will be closely examined including, perhaps, some that have not seen the light of day since the BOOK OF THOTH was supposedly tossed into the Nile River. . . Your questions, suggestions, and tid-bits of information (to add to our own) will be most welcome.

Also: If you have a COVEN going in your neighborhood (or a facsimile thereof) slip us a telephone or a box number for printing and you just may increase your membership.

ABOUT WITCHES AND SUCH: AN OBJECTIVE PEEK

The history of witches in the Western World is similar to the history of other more recent minorities in that the information available was usually written by others. Witches have been portrayed both as frolicking winsome creatures of joy, or as foulsome wretched old

hags of defeat and despair depending on which 'expert' one reads. Little has been recorded on pre-Christian witches. And, unfortunately, data on Christian era witches has in the main been recorded by their persecutors who were anything but unbiased.

Witchcraft was and is an old established cult, with its own rites, rules, devotions, hierarchy, and holidays, similar to any other organized religion. Anthropological study has traced witchcraft back to the ancient cult of the Horned God which recurs historically throughout Western Europe, openly or underground, from Paleolithic man to the present time. Some of the feast days and rituals tend to identify witchcraft with the pagan fertility religion of Europe: the old religion. There is also belief in Diane as the Goddess and her daughter as the female Messiah. Diane has always played an important role in fertility rites. Still others—more catholic in their religion than in their attitudes—feel witchcraft was a blasphemous invention of the Devil to win Christians to his evil will and should be dealt with as a moral problem with a *final solution*.

The origins of witchcraft may be as buried as many of its practitioners, but its ancient claim to being a legitimate religion cannot be discredited. One but need study the testimonies and confessions of countless men and women derived of the witch trials, the great period of persecution, to realize that they were serious in their devotion to their God. Throughout the trials the accused consistently referred to their leader as God or Grandmaster or some like name. The idea of the

Devil as 'grandmaster' was purely a Christian tactic, with the name of the *Devil* being superimposed over *any* god who did not answer to a Christian name.

Although witchhunts began with Pope Gregory I in 600, it was not until the 13th and 14th centuries that church, state, and anyone else who stood to gain from it, organized frequent and serious attacks on witches. The Inquisition blamed witchcraft for anything it could get away with, condemning many innocent men and women as well as those who actually took part in secret rites. A few of the more important papal bulls against witches were Eugene IV who stated witches who caused bad weather were to be punished, Gregory IV equating demon worship with debauchery, and Innocent VIII (*Summis Desiderantes*, 1484) which amounted to open warfare on witches. The recorders at the trials were of course court reporters who had to constantly reassure the Church of their loyalty, therefore the records left are unsympathetic to the religion of the people involved. Constant references to Devil, Demon, Evil One, Prince of Darkness, and especially Fiend, tend to damage the quality of the records. Today we would call such procedure *yellow journalism*.

Despite the name-calling, a clear idea of the cult can be recreated. Through the words of the victims one can obtain all the information

needed to acquaint modern readers with a religion that was able to withstand so much.

In England, for example, the area with which we are best acquainted, each group of followers, or congregation, had a coven. Coven is the term used to identify the thirteen members of the *elite* who decided policy, attended all meetings, performed the ceremonies, and generally took the lead in all matters concerning the whole group. The coven consisted of twelve male or female witches, and their leader. The leader was the Devil or their god depending on your point of view. To his followers he was God incarnate and evidence records that he appeared as a man or a boy or a goat with horns. He either attended meetings in person or had a substitute who acted in his place depending on the nature of the meeting. The substitute was the officer of the coven whose duties included summoning members to meetings and keeping attendance records, as well as aide-de-camp to the master. Every coven had a musician, sometimes two, as dancing and merrymaking were important parts of any meeting. The rest of the coven members could be considered as elders of the faith.

More than one coven could exist in a district, depending on the size and needs of the area. Each coven was independent but not autonomous in that all covens were under

the one master. A coven could sometimes unite with one or more other covens when a special effort was needed, as in the case of the witches who 'confessed' to participation in a plot to kill James VI of Scotland. Three covens combined their powers to raise a storm so that James would not complete his sea voyage from Oslo to Leith with his bride. There seems to have been a division of labor and talent, however, since one raised the storm by casting a properly prepared cat into the sea, while the others prepared a potion of toad poison, and worked on a wax image of the King. There are additional recorded instances of covens working together. As a rule, however, a single coven was able to work successfully, or unsuccessfully, alone.

Much of the magic witches practiced, such as preparing potions, divining, healing, or cursing, was done in private. Favorite herbs were hemp, cardamon, chicory, flax, coriander, and anise. Other ingredients more familiar to modern readers of fairy tales or folklore were toads, spiders, and the innards of doves, hares, sparrows, or swallows. The concoction used by the witches to fly to meetings were usually ointments made from belladonna and aconite. These drugs produced excitement and hallucinations.

Witches gatherings on a yearly basis were divided into weekly meet-

ings (Esbats) attended by the members of the coven, and four *great Sabbaths* to which the entire congregation came. The business affairs of the coven were discussed and settled at the Esbats. The members gave a brief account of their week's activities to the Master or his substitute. He in turn gave advice or instruction to his followers. Information regarding new converts was also discussed at the Esbats. After the business was completed, the sacred dance was performed, then the feast, after which the meeting came to an end.

The Sabbaths were Candlemas (February 2), May Eve, Lammas (August 1), and All Hallows Eve (November). Sabbaths are identified with the opening of the breeding season for livestock.

The Sabbaths began at dusk and ended at dawn. The business part of the Sabbaths was generally the same as it was for the Esbats with less detail since all of the members of the coven did not have to attend the Sabbaths, although most did. Since the whole congregation attended the Sabbaths, the after-business part was more animated. The great quarterly Sabbaths were joyous occasions for the followers. They danced, feasted, paid homage to their master, admitted new members, and celebrated rites which included sacrifices and orgiastic ceremonies. The latter activity has made witches perhaps more interesting

than they would have been.

As in the Esbats, dancing often began and ended the Sabbaths. The first dance performed was the processional, with the Master, or his substitute, leading the others in a kind of free-form follow-the-leader to the side of the more important sacred ring dance. Here they would form a circle with their backs to the center, hold hands, and dance to music supplied by flute, violin, and pipes. Whatever the religious significance of worship the dance symbolized, it did tend to relax everyone, to put them in the proper frenzied mood for the all night revelry that lay ahead.

The feast varied with either the master or the members supplying the food. When the members supplied the food it reflected the wealth of the particular congregation plus the culinary gifts of the ladies (an Iowa Methodist picnic?); the foods including the usual meat, cheese, cake, and wine.

The devotions to the master came at the beginning of the meeting. The master, dressed in grand array, carried a lighted candle on his head which the congregation used in turn to light their candles. They would then offer their burning candles to the master singing hymns and chanting his praises.

Children of members were admitted into the congregation while in infancy. This ceremony usually followed the devotion to the master.

The mother would simply dedicate her child to the master. When the child reached puberty he had to repeat his dedication to the master in his own words. At this time he received a mark as a symbol of his tie, and so that all could see he was now a full member. The marking seems to have been a form of tattooing since it was permanent.

When an adult was admitted to the congregation the ceremony was more complex, in that the initiate was questioned at length and then made to renounce the faith of his birth. After this the convert dedicated himself to his new master with words and a kiss wherever the master stipulated—which was not always, as the church would like us to believe—“under the tail.” The new member would then receive his mark. The mark could be made anywhere. The significance of the location is debatable; that their master was imaginative in his selection is certain. Sometimes the novice received a new name, but this depended on local custom and did not always occur. The member was also given an animal, designated by the master, to be his familiar. He then received full instructions for divination.

Sacrificial rites usually involved the shedding of blood. The followers often drew blood from themselves to offer the master as a private gift. Animals were used for con-

juring and casting but rarely killed as a sacrifice at a meeting, although they could be sacrificed in private. In certain areas the cult was accused by the Church of sacrificing infants and eating their flesh: the flesh of an infant being considered sacred, magical.

When the trails of the various inquisitions were at their peak, witches were said to have eaten the flesh of infants to obtain the secret of silence, since the infants had never spoken. The witches supposedly believed that they would also be able to withstand torture and not confess or betray if they ate the flesh. This ritual is called sympathetic magic.

Whether or not the children were actually killed, no one can truthfully say today. It is not our purpose to excuse a possibility of infanticide or, conversely, to hypocritically moralize as so many otherwise competent writers in the field have done. We deem it sufficient to the situation to say that the infant mortality rate of the times was such to have supplied the cultists with ample offerings.

Another example of sympathetic magic were the orgies. During these ceremonies the followers believed that the land and the animals were made more fertile. The master took part in these ceremonies as either incubus or succubus depending upon which role he performed in the sexual experience.

A later addition to the Sabbath was the Black Mass. Before Christianity offered more interesting ceremonies to parody, the religious rites were actually less formal if not less important.

Modern witches have added four feast days to the yearly total to denote the solstitial divisions of: autumn equinox, winter solstice, spring equinox, and summer solstice. The tools of the cult remain basically the same. Each witch has an *athame* or sacred black-handled knife which they still make themselves. The circle, ancient symbol of eternity, is used as the center of serious activity. The idea of the circle is repeated in the round garter that the witches receive during initiation. The garter is worn around the waist and is similar to the belt in Judo in that color identifies rank. The women wear necklaces made of pearl or glass beads. The higher-ranking women have a silver bracelet (color of the moon) which they wear on their arms.

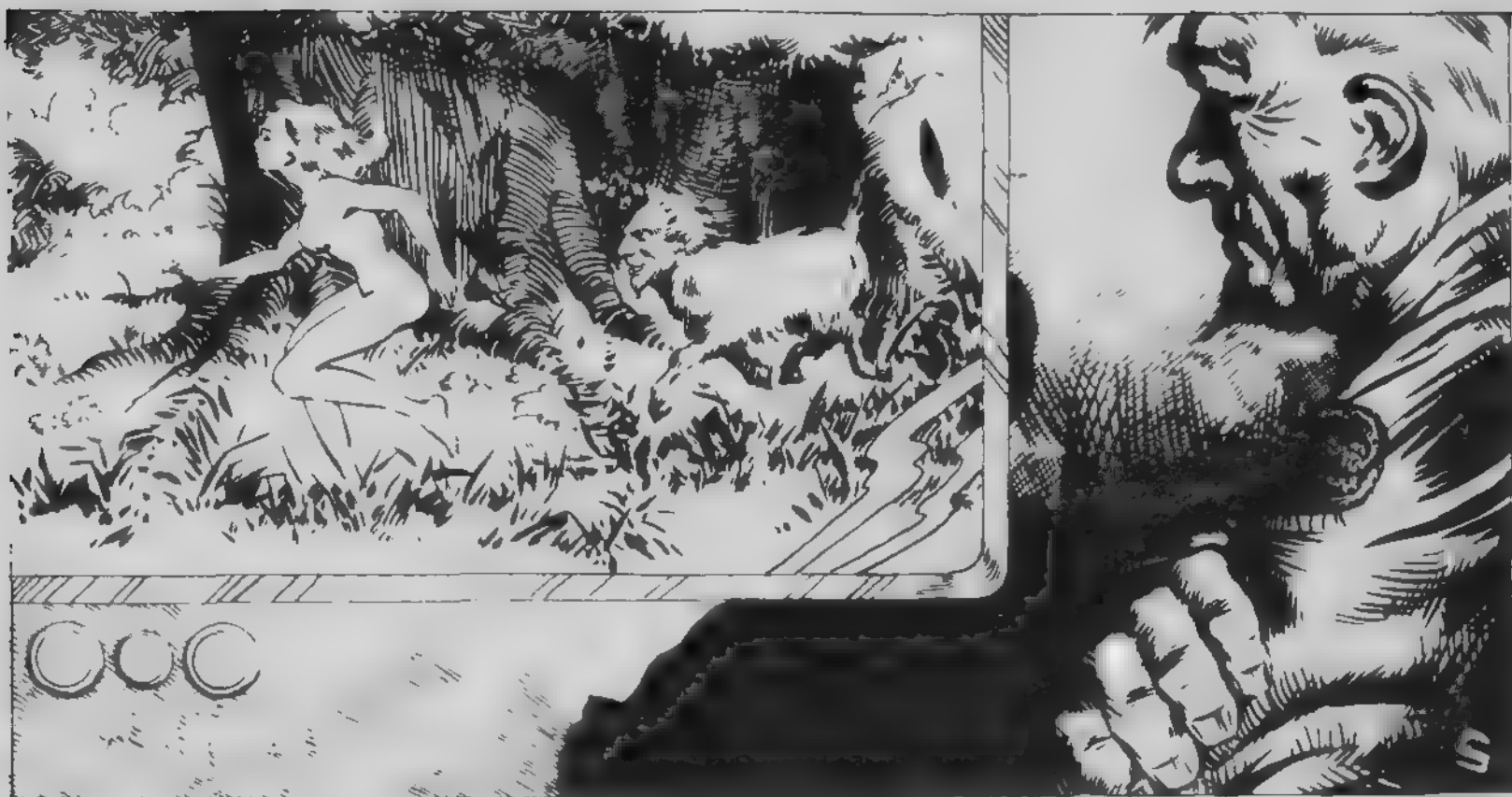
Other accessories include a silver chalice, candles, a wand of hazlewood, a small cauldron, a cen-

ser, a pentacle which is a flat piece of metal engraved with witch signs, a length of cord, a scourge, and a bowl filled with salt. Each item is symbolic. The cauldron represents water, the wand fire, the salt and scourge purification, the pentacle earth, the *athames* air, and the length of cord, in a continuation of the circle symbol, is the spirit that unites all of the elements.

Through the years nature seems to have replaced the master as a direct worship figure. Members of modern covens still genuflect, however, to a god who represents fertility rather than a promise of eternal bliss. To quote a modern English witch: "We worship nature which does not change because of the atomic bomb or television." We believe in helping people and most of all we believe in joy." Most witches apparently were condemned to death for their faith *rather than their acts*. Today, their inheritors enjoy a semblance of acceptability. Unfortunately, however, this seems due more to a change in the nonbelievers among us rather than of the believers. ●

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The Transmogrification of *Ridgely P. Winters*

By Joseph Harris

Illustrated by William Stout

More 'goings-on' in the nether world of Chthon, as viewed by our devil's advocate, Mr. Joseph Harris. This olio of scalpel, Jung, and nate is either the biggest 'put-on', or the most erudite bit of whimsy this editor has come across in many a moon—and I don't know which!

The car skidded, leaped a narrow ditch, tumbled through a thicket and came to rest on its battered side at the edge of a peaceful meadow. Its driver and only occupant hung limply from the window while his life's blood ran out on the sun-baked meadow. On this pleasant Thursday afternoon the troubled young man had been on his way to

his regular appointment with a noted analyst when the accident occurred. . .

"Mr. Winters, you're next. Follow me, please."

Ridgely Winters got up from the chair where he had been sitting alone in a long, gray corridor that seemed to have no end. He looked

at the fair young female who had spoken. She was dressed in a nurse's white uniform and her face was exceedingly pleasant to look at, wreathed in black curls and a pleasing smile. Her waxen complexion glowed with a slight funereal pallor. When she turned to walk down the polished corridor Ridgely noticed that she also presented a pleasant posterior view. Her nates had a mesmeric quality as she walked, and he found himself staring fetishly as he followed her. He noticed a large red **C** on her back such as he had seen embroidered on her bosom. He wondered about its significance and was about to ask her when he saw his name written in very large letters on the chart she was holding. He peered intently over her shoulder, but soon discovered that the page beneath his name was blank. Puzzled, he resumed his contemplation of the swaying nates and listened to the pleasant rhythm of her heels as they clicked on the shining floor. He wondered if there were anymore like her wherever she came from.

When they had walked what seemed to him well over a mile, the nurse stopped at a door on which a plaque hung with a name Dr. Sigmund on it. Underneath the doctor's name, in bronze letters, were the words, *Pontiff Supreme of Chthonia*. The nurse immediately genuflected before the closed door and then rose and made a strange sign which Ridgely interpreted as having some

sacred meaning.

"What is this place?" he asked, completely bewildered.

"This is Dr. Sigmund's headquarters," she replied, astounded at his inability to read the plaque.

"No," he said, "I mean the name of this place."

"Oh," she smiled. "This is Chthonia, Mr. Winters."

"Then it isn't—"

"Isn't what, Mr. Winters?"

"It isn't Hell then?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Surely you've heard of hell. You know, it goes by many names—Hell, Hades, Inferno, the Bottomless pit, Sheol, and other names."

"I've never heard any of those names, Mr. Winters. Maybe Dr. Sigmund would know. He's a genius. He's writing a book about superstitions."

Ridgely sighed deeply and relaxed. His palest fears about the possibility of such a place were quieted. "So this is Chthonia," he said, pointing to the large initial on her bosom. She nodded and smiled.

He looked about at the gray barrenness of the corridor that seemed to converge somewhere in infinity. So there really wasn't a hell after all. Not that he had ever really thought there was, but one got strange quirks about such things sometimes. Well, at least it was a relief to know one didn't have to spend one's time in such a possibil-

ity. He looked at his wrist watch and was amazed to see that it had no face. Nothing but blank grayness stared at him. He turned to the nurse again.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Time, Mr. Winters?" She shook her head.

"Oh, yes—of course." He must get out of his old habits of thinking. There was no time here. He must learn to think in terms of eternity. He didn't like that word somehow: it had religious overtones. Perhaps Dr. Sigmund would have a more pleasing way of expressing it.

The nurse opened the door and said: "Follow me, Mr. Winters." Ridgely followed her into a room as barren and gray as the corridor. They walked but seemed to cover little distance. The nurse's heels clicked on monotonously. Soon he noticed at intervals of twenty feet or more on either wall effigies of Priapus exquisitely done in bas-relief. At the base of each towering effigy a small cresset burned, causing the dim light to play over the body of the god like lambent hands. He looked back frequently because he had a strange sensation that he was being followed. He could see nothing.

The nurse stopped suddenly and pointed to a large chair in the middle of the room. "Please sit there, Mr. Winters. Dr. Sigmund will see you presently."

Ridgely walked over and sat in

the chair. He watched the nurse disappear into the darkness before him. It was an impenetrable darkness into which he peered, a darkness that made the grayness of the room appear light in contrast. In a few moments he heard his name called by a masculine voice with megaphonic clarity. It frightened him to hear, "Mr. Winters, Mr. Winters," echoing in the large room.

Before he could respond, the same voice said: "This is Dr. Sigmund, Mr. Winters. Welcome to Chthonia." And as these last words were spoken, out of the darkness as if projected on a cinema screen, a form became visible. Only the upper part of the body was visible at first as if it were emerging from the floor. When the form became clear Ridgely saw a white haired man with a thin white beard sitting behind an ornate desk that looked like an altar. The great gray face was looking at him intently with the hypnotic eyes of an old psychoanalyst. To avoid the unpleasantness of looking into that hypnotic eye, Ridgely arrested his sight on the pile of books on the desk. Some of the titles were turned away from his line of vision, but he could read three or four. THE CONFESSIONS OF ST. AUGUSTINE. GULLIVER'S TRAVELS. and BRAVE NEW WORLD were among the easier read titles. These literary masterpieces were selected as the chief references for the Doctor's forthcoming work

entitled, STUDIES IN PSYCHOSEXUALITY.

Ridgely saw the Doctor press a button and soon the nurse reappeared and stood at attention beside the desk. Without turning his head, the Pontiff Supreme said: "Routine fluoroscopy, Miss Gonada."

In an instant Miss Gonada turned again into the darkness and as quickly reappeared with another wax-like figure almost her identical in appearance. They were pushing a large mechanical object on wheels that bore a striking resemblance to the conventional fluoroscope. With practised proficiency they wheeled the monstrosity over to Ridgely and proceeded, without a word, by a process of levers, wheels and slides, to adjust the machine to the patient's head. When the glass slide of the machine was adjusted to the correct cephalic position, leaving the eyes of the patient uncovered, Miss Gonada said: "Ready, sir."

The Pontiff descended from his altar-desk and took his position in a chair placed in front and a little to the side of his patient. He looked much less awesome at close range, Ridgely thought. After the Doctor had adjusted his chair and Miss Gonada stood by, notebook and pencil in hand, he turned to the other waxen female and said: "All right, Miss Fallopian."

In a moment electricity (or some Chthonic equivalent thereof) had the machine humming. The Pontiff

Supreme leaned closer to the glass slide. Momentarily certain that he was being electrocuted, Ridgely's impulse to break away and run was soon arrested. Suddenly, with Klieg-light brilliance, scene sequences began to flash on that background of darkness. Each scene was brilliantly clear and lasted for a minute or two. Ridgely's eyes protruded in amazement at the first scene—an image of St. Francis receiving the Stigmata, while a tribe of Amazons punctured his body with poisoned darts. Dr. Sigmund looked closely at the slide, said "Hm-m-m" and dictated something to Miss Gonada in Latin.

The second scene: an animated scene in which there appeared a voluptuously nude woman—looking much like Ridgely thought Miss Gonada must look beneath her nurse's habit—who was being chased by a sybaritic creature with a goat's body and a man's head. The monster snapped salaciously at the fugitive buttocks of the nude. Around and around the pair went in frenzied chase. At the end of that scene the Pontiff Supreme said, "Hm-m—" with special emphasis and called to Miss Fallopian, "Repeat, please." The amatory pursuit was immediately repeated and the Doctor leaned even closer to scrutinize the cerebral digestion of his patient. When the second performance ended the Doctor dictated a very long note in his best pontifical Latin.

The third scene: a little girl in white sitting in a thicket holding a mangled flower in her tiny fist. She was weeping while hundreds of slimy snakes writhed about her. She seemed to weep for the flower, paying little heed to the serpents. At this scene Ridgely turned his eyes away and would not look again when the Pontiff told Miss Fallopian to repeat the scene. Two or three emphatic "Hmm-m-m's" came from the Doctor, and Miss Gonada found it difficult to take his rapid dictation on this occasion.

Then scene after scene—a Dalian landscape of fleshy distortions and third-dimensional perspective which symbolized heaven knows what; a shining monstrosity changed into a witches cauldron; a Bacchanalian orgy scene; pawing satyrs and prancing unicorns; a small boy urinating with niagaran velocity from a mountain top; a procession of dis-cased penitents treading the bodies of dead vermin; incubi and succubi; on and on until Ridgely thought his eyes would pop from their sockets at the prolonged nightmare. To each scene, however, the Pontiff gave his professional best in reading the fluoroscope. When he finally finished, Miss Gonada had a notebook of very fine Latin.

That will be all, Mr. Winters," said Dr. Sigmund, leaning back and massaging his eyes. "From here you

must go to Dr. Wilhelm and then to Dr. Daft-Ebbtide. After that you return to me for classification. Miss Gonada will take care of you."

Ridgely sat in puzzled silence while Miss Gonada and Miss Fallopian wheeled away the fluoroscope. He watched Dr. Sigmund go back to his desk in that strange penumbra and settle immediately to work. He was writing a book on the psychical anomalies of sainthood and had just finished a whole chapter on the exhibitionism of St. Francis, based on the incident of the saint's having mounted the pulpit in the nude to preach. He was now ready to tackle a chapter on the self-castration of Origen. If this book didn't prove once and for all that sainthood was the ultimate insanity, then he would have to find some other way to expose the nonsense of religion. Before he began to write he lighted a smokeless cigar (brimstone, fire, and therefore smoke weren't permitted in Chthonia) and settled back in his chair.

"Come this way, Mr. Winters," said Miss Gonada, beckoning from the semi-darkness.

Ridgely got up and followed her. Soon they were in another endless gray corridor. Weren't there anything but gray corridors in Chthonia! But perhaps one could get used to that after a little time (he quickly erased the last phrase from his mind)—after a few eternities. The swaying nates and the clicking

heels again.

"Miss Gonada."

"Yes."

"What did Dr. Sigmund mean by classification?"

"Why, just what he said, of course. Everyone must be classified in Chthonia. You'll see." She spoke over her shoulder as she walked along.

"But suppose I don't want to be classified."

The clicking heels stopped. Miss Gonada turned, her face ablaze with contempt for such heresy. "Look, Mr. Winters, it isn't what you want in Chthonia. You'll do as you are told. There is no such thing as unclassified persons in Chthonia."

Ridgely was promptly reduced to silence.

"And besides," said Miss Gonada less heatedly as she turned and resumed her walk down the corridor, "it's an honor to be classified. Why, if you weren't classified you wouldn't be worth that." She snapped her fingers.

"Are you classified?"

"Certainly."

"Do you mind if I ask what your classification is?"

"Why, no," Miss Gonada swelled a little with Chthonic pride. "I'm a Hypertonalnymphomaniac."

"Oh, I see."

"There are a lot of us. You see we are all nurses. Miss Fallopian is a Hypy too. We call ourselves Hypy for short. Everybody has his duties

but when you're off duty you can do whatever your classification calls for." Miss Gonada smiled at Ridgely over her shoulder. "It's fun, Mr. Winters. You'll like Chthonia. Maybe you'll get a classification something like mine."

"But I don't understand. If you are segregated according to classification, how can you—?"

"Oh, I see what you mean," said Miss Gonada, adjusting one of her straps. "How do we have fun? That's what you mean, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, you see, the Hypys can associate with the Leptics."

"The Leptics?"

"Yes, they are the men. Their classification is Hypertonalnympholeptic."

"Oh, I see."

"It's all very scientific, Mr. Winters. Almost everybody can have friends outside his own classification. Why, they're some here who have more than one classification; but they're very special. They're geniuses."

Ridgely immediately envisioned the life of a Leptic moving in the same circles with Miss Gonada. Or perhaps, with his high I.Q., he would have the privilege of moving in wider circles. At any rate classification didn't seem to be half so bad as he thought it would be. He felt eager enough to whistle, but he decided he had better refrain since he wasn't acquainted fully with the mores of

Chthonia.

Another measureless distance in another endless gray corridor. Then, with an uncertainty decidedly not characteristic of the ultra proficient Miss Gonada, she stopped before a door through which the faintest sounds of Bebop and a swish-swish rhythm issued forth. She hesitated a moment as if impelled to perform some clandestine act. She looked up and down the vast grayness of the corridor and, seeing no person of pontifical magnitude, she opened the door furtively, very careful not to disturb the occupants. The open door let forth a blast of uninhibited Bebop the like of which Ridgely had never heard in his good old terrestrial days. He soon discovered that the swish-swish rhythm did not come from the Bebopian drummer, but from an incessant whirr of whips writhing like sinuous serpents in the air. Miss Gonada opened the door wider to view the scene better.

Over her shoulder, Ridgely could see a group of nudes, male and female, moving in an infra-red setting reminiscent of Heironymous Bosch. Each figure, whether robust or emaciated, held in his hand a long whip with which he frantically flayed the body nearest himself while his own face was alight with the pleasure of the affectionate strokes falling on his own torso. A Bebop trumpet uncurled its serpentine entrails into

the feverish air, and the diapason of frenzy stretched itself to dissonant absurdity. A lone Bebopian, with a gargantuan atomizer, stood spraying the sweating flock with civet to sweeten the uses of perversity. The two intruders watched unnoticed for quite a while before Miss Gonada finally, and with obvious reluctance, closed the door. When she turned around her face was flushed, Ridgely thought, with much more than the hue of the infra-red interior. She looked sheepishly at Ridgely.

"Sorry. Wrong room," she said, resuming her officious air. "The *Flagellantes* are having a little get-together."

Ridgely smiled at her redundancy and once again took up his rear-guard position in the gray corridor. Well, Chthonia had its varied aspects after all! Who really knew the spice of its infinite variety! One could spend a lifetime (an eternity)

Clickity-clack, clickity-clack

Miss Gonada has a sexy back.

The door of Dr. Wilhelm's office was embossed in bronze almost as elaborately as was the Pontiff Supreme's. Underneath this Trinitarian's name were the words: DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL AND DIGITAL DEXTERITY.

Ridgely breathed heavily as they entered this austere department. He had an idea what this would be like. He had taken I.Q. tests before—that is terrestrial I.Q. tests, and

somehow he felt that the Chthonic tests couldn't be very different. He took a deep breath and set his jaw. He had always made a phenomenal score, and he didn't intend to let any Chthonic test stump him.

He followed Miss Gonada into a room smaller in size than the Pontiff Supreme's but much brighter. The walls were a maze of Picasso-like figures and cubistic abstractions done in distortions along the walls and made him feel that he was undressed or at least had an open fly. Suspended from the ceiling on long chains were large models of modern sculpture which revolved slowly just above his head. Headless torsos, personified busoms, featureless faces, elongated femurs, and visceral monstrosities of all kinds wheeled tediously in perpetual exhibition.

Ridgely walked with his head in clouds of art toward the front of the room where a short, corpulent man in a gray jacket sat at a kidney-shaped desk working a Chthonic crossword puzzle. The man was clean shaven and had large protruding eyes, which made Ridgely suspect exophthalmia. He looked up and smiled faintly when Miss Gonada handed him Ridgely's chart. Reluctantly he put aside his puzzle and began to read the pontifical Latin. Miss Gonada stood dutifully by.

Ridgely was motioned to a chair behind a table with a mosaic top as intricate as the pattern of a Persian

rug. In that uncomfortable silence Ridgely distracted himself by looking at some words semantically disembowelled on the blackboard behind Dr. Wilhelm. Semantics! Ah, what a subject to sharpen one's wits! How well he understood that verbal mutilation on the board! Thanks to Professor. . .er. . .Will. . . (what was his name? that terrestrial professor of English). . .Professor Wilton; many thanks for introducing him to Korsybski, *et al.* Chthonic semantics didn't seem to be very different from terrestrial semantics. He tapped his fingernails impatiently on the mosaic table top.

"Welcome to Chthonia, Mr. Winters," said the second Trinitarian, handing the chart back to Miss Gonada. "My name is Dr. Wilhelm." Then with that important announcement he stared at Ridgely through the thick, telescopic lens of his spectacles until Ridgely felt as he thought some poor imprisoned bacteria must feel looking up the barrel of a microscope at the omnipresent, scientific eye which stared with such theistic scrutiny. He felt, too, that all those geometric eyes on the wall were pinning him to a focal point in the room. Yes, isolated just like a microscopic smear. Before the pressure of the eyes became too great, however, he heard the Doctor say to the nurse: "Miss Gonada, bring the Chthonic Comprehensive Wilhelm-Sigmund-Ebbtide Vocabulary Test, please."

Immediately Miss Gonada went to the corner of the room and took from a wall safe, after opening it by some *open sesame* word known only to her order of Chthonians, a thick package of papers. She handed the papers to Dr. Wilhelm and waited while he arranged and selected the desired parts. He returned the papers to Miss Gonada and instructed her to place them before Ridgely. When she had done this she left the room.

"You're familiar with the method of intelligence testing, I'm sure, Mr. Winters," said Dr. Wilhelm. "You're aware then that speed, accuracy, and comprehension must be equally considered if you are to have the advantage of a high score. I advise you to read the instructions thoroughly and ask no questions once the test has begun. I will give you the signal to begin and also the signal to stop. Remember—speed, accuracy, comprehension. Are you ready? All right—begin!" The Doctor immediately returned to his crossword puzzle.

Ridgely was off. He breathed easier when he saw the striking similarity between Chthonic and terrestrial tests. Why, this was routine stuff to an old I.Q. hand! The first part was vocabulary of the simplest sort that any terrestrial dolt would know. . . (1) glossalalia (2) fellare (3) somesthetic (4) coprophilia (5) kinetoscopescope. . . on and on. . . a hundred

or so such words of the easiest kind. Whatever misgiving he had had about the difficulty of Chthonic tests were now dispelled as he raced on with speed, accuracy and comprehension. At last he was in his element. He was already beginning to feel at home in Chthonia.

The second part was the Wilhelm Maze Test (obviously modeled on the Porteus Maze Test of terrestrial fame). Then the third part: such questions as, *Do you like women? Why? Do you have nocturnal emissions? Why? Do you like chewing gum? Why? Were any of your predecessors anthropoids? Why?* There were many such questions which Ridgely thought could be applicable only to denizens of the planet Earth.

After that he had to work an exceedingly simple Chthonic Double Crostic, a semantic problem (O erudite joy) and a few problems of psychological geometry. He finished long before any signal was given and sat drumming his fingers on the surrealistic mosaic. It was this staccato sound which roused Dr. Wilhelm from his crossword meditation with a look of incredulity. Surely this neophyte had not already completed the Wilhelm test!

"Have you finished so soon, Mr. Winters?"

"Yes, sir."

"And checked your answers thoroughly?"

"Yes, sir."

Dr. Wilhelm wanted to say "Amazing" or some equivalent expletive, but he thought a moment and decided to check the result of the test first. After all, this fellow might have a moron's score. And too, he didn't like the idea of his test being finished so quickly. The Trinity had collaborated on this test and it was not to be taken lightly. With silent, but obvious skepticism, Dr. Wilhelm looked at Ridgely and walked over to the table where he was sitting. He wiggled the right side of his obese posterior on to the table and thereby blotted out a very profound portion of surrealism. Large rolls of abdominal protoplasm ballooned his trousers to nauseating proportions and he wheezed a little at the burden of carrying it all. He picked up the test papers and checked them cursorily. There was an answer to each question anyway, but whether they were the right or wrong answers would soon be known. He looked skeptically at Ridgely.

"The last part of the examination will be digital dexterity, Mr. Winters. Please do not be too hasty, but think carefully before you act. This part is very important and looks much easier than it is. Many fail it."

"Yes, sir."

Dr. Wilhelm wiggled himself to a standing position and clapped his hands. Miss Gonada materialized. She was holding three large, amorphous pieces of wood which looked

as if some band-saw artist had fashioned them out of a nightmare. They bore no relation to standard dimensions of Euclidean geometry, but deviated in every direction from what is accepted as a mathematical norm. She placed the three pieces before Ridgely.

"Of course, you realize, Mr. Winters," said the Doctor, pointing to the shapeless wood, "that the product of these three pieces must equal a square. And let me repeat—don't be overconfident. I cannot overestimate the importance of this last part. Now remember—think before you act. All right—begin!"

While Ridgely studied the wood blocks, Dr. Wilhelm took the test back to his desk to score it. Miss Gonada disappeared. Chthonic eternity flowed on.

With a few deft movements Ridgely shaped the three pieces of wood into a square. It had required no great thought; in fact, he could have done it much faster, but he had waited a while out of deference to the Doctor. There it was: the riddle of life solved in a few seconds! Shapelessness given proportion and meaning! Order out of chaos! The empirical ingenuity of the mind! There were the meaningless parts! Put them all together and they spell SEX in large red letters. He ran his hand appreciatively over the waxed surface of the wood that only a few moments ago had been

utter chaos. He began drumming on the mosaic again. Soon, Dr. Wilhelm looked up, scowled, and turned back to his scoring.

Much later, after Ridgely had dismantled and reconstructed the riddle several times, Dr. Wilhelm finished the score and brought the results to his examinee. He spread the papers before Ridgely and looked at him with almost obsequious eyes. "Mr. Winters," he said, his voice full of astonishment, "I have never had such a phenomenal score on a test before. You have made a record in Chthonia. Out of the entire test you missed only one question." Thumbing through the papers, he chose one and handed it to Ridgely. To the question: *What persisting superstition will eventually cause the inhabitants of the planet Earth to destroy themselves?* Ridgely had answered, *Social Security*. The correct answer, however, according to the Chthonic answer-book, was supposed to be: *belief in god*. Of course! Of course! How stupid of him to miss that! Why, he had written an essay on that very subject back in his terrestrial days. He cursed himself in silence.

"Of course, Mr. Winters," said the Doctor, "your score is still incredible, and I want to congratulate you. We're proud to have you in Chthonia."

When Ridgely took the Trinitarians hand his emotion knew no bounds. To touch a Trinitarian was

surely what was meant by illumination in Chthonia. He found it difficult to hold back the tears.

"And now, to add to your greater glory," Dr. Wilhelm continued, "I see you have solved the riddle." He pointed to the square on which the word SEX was spelled. "Many have failed that, my friend." What is that excellent way of putting it? *Many are called but few are chosen*. Yes, that's so true. You are one of the chosen, my friend." He reached over and patted Ridgely affectionately on the shoulder. At this Ridgely could hardly contain himself. To be greeted by such an endearment as "my friend" by a Trinitarian was one thing, but to be patted affectionately on the back—oh joy unimaginable! "Yes, yes," Dr. Wilhelm went on, "few are that fortunate, my friend. Most are not so gifted." He paused a moment in deep analysis and looked at Ridgely. "What is that line of poetry? *Sex is Truth, Truth sex, that is all ye know on earth, and all you need to know*. Nothing more profound has ever been said, my friend."

Vaguely Ridgely recalled Professor Wilton's class; but he remembered that he hadn't thought much of the poet at the time. Now he was able to see the profundity of the poem.

"Yes, my friend," Dr. Wilhelm said as he gave Ridgely a last affectionate pat of dismissal. "You will go far in Chthonia. You already

show qualifications as a hierophant I am keeping my eyes on you, Mr Winters."

"Thank you, sir." He shook hands with the corpulent Trinitarian. "I hope I will not dissappoint you."

Miss Gonada materialized and Dr. Wilhelm dictated a brief note in Basic English. Then Ridgely, floating in clouds of Chthonic pride followed her into yet another gray corridor. The thought of his some day being a high priest of Chthonia transfixed him. Some day Miss Gonada would be following *him* down the long gray corridors listening to the click of *his* heels, admiring *his* dorsal anatomy, assuming her proper place in the Chthonic heirarchy. How would she like that!

Clickity-clack, clickity-clack
Dr. Winters is a quack---

Another grey corridor; another immeasurable distance; another door. On this door: Dr. Daft-Ebbtide, and beneath this name, in the usual Chthonic bronze: DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOANALYSIS, HYPOANALYSIS, DEEP ANALYSIS, AND URINALYSIS. Miss Gonada paused and stepped back as the door opened. Two white robed Hypertonalnymphomaniacs wearing the embroidered C wheeled out a rolling stretcher on which lay an anaesthetized male whose profusely bandaged head gave him the appearance of a prostrate Sikh. He was raving anaesthetically,

shouting profanities at the God of the Terrestrians, muttering repeatedly *Ave Sigmund* and *Vive Chthonia*; in short, directing his libido into its proper channels.

When the delirious Chthonian passed on down the corridor, Miss Gonada sighed deeply and crossed herself in a manner that seemed to describe a circle with a triangle in its center. "Thank Sigmund," she said, looking at Ridgely. "At last! At last! He's on his way to recovery. He has been one of the toughest problems in Chthonia. He started with mild Terrestritis."

"What did he finally develop?"

"Theophilia," she almost whispered.

"Oh how horrid! Poor Fellow!"

"Yes, the most dreaded disease in Chthonia. It's very rare, but, as you know, often fatal. It requires radical surgery."

"You mean---"

"Trepanation."

"That *is* drastic."

"But much better than lingering on and on in theological delusion."

"Indeed. Decidedly better."

"Well, anyway," Miss Gonada sighed with Chthonic altruism, "he has passed the worst part. He's on the road to recovery at last."

She crossed herself and said another *Ave Sigmund*.

She led the way into another room in proportion like those of the two preceding Trinitarians but, as was to be expected, unlike them in

interior decoration. Over the door in large Dantesque words, was the inscription: MENS INSANA IN CORPORE INSANO. On the walls, in vast numbers, were mottoes, Sigmundian injunctions, Chthonic epigrams, and a general array of hortative literature designed to bolster the mental health of Chthonia. One aphorism in particular struck Ridgely's fancy. It was: MAN INTRUDES BUT GOD DELUDES. Most of the apothegms were in Chthonic English or Latin, but there were a few, presumably Zoquean, which he could not read. He followed Miss Gonada on into the center of the room where she stopped and spoke to Miss Fallopian, who was cleaning a blood-smeared trephine.

"Where's Dr. Daft-Ebbtide?" she asked the scrub nurse.

"In the lavatory," Miss Fallopian replied, wiping the moisture from her waxen brow. "He'll be back in a moment."

"Was the operation a success?"

"I think so," said Miss Fallopian, inspecting the clean trephine. "He cut out the nastiest theistic carcinoma I've ever seen. Oh, it was monstrous."

"I'll bet you're tired."

"Dead."

"Go on and get some rest."

"Just as soon as I clean up."

"Going to the party tonight?"

"Wouldn't miss it for all Chthonia."

"Willy going?"

"Sure. You know Willy. He

wouldn't miss a party."

"Have you any extra *drenes*? I'm out of them."

"Sure," said Miss Fallopian, reaching into her pocket and taking out a handful of red capsules. "How many?"

"Oh, four or five."

Miss Fallopian put a baker's half-dozen of the capsules (a product called chthonodrene, designed to prolong the orgasmic postlude) into her friend's hand just for good measure.

"Thanks. I'll repay you."

"Forget it."

"See you tonight."

"Right." Miss Fallopian gave some occult sign of approval known only to the Hypertoannymphomaniacal sorority and, having thus saluted her sister, went into another room.

Miss Gonada led Ridgely to a large couch in one corner of the room and told him to make himself comfortable. He did by stretching out on the couch with his hands behind his head. Miss Gonada sat in another corner of the room and busied herself with a Chthonic crossword puzzle she carried for just such lapses into the daily routine. Ridgely scanned the room from his strategic position on the couch. He saw two or three operating tables draped in white; a chthonogen tent; an array of graduated trephines prepared for any kind of cephalic exploration; a table with what appeared to be

obstetrical stirrups (this puzzled him for it was obvious that reproduction could not exist in Chthonia) a mesmeric wheel which, when revolved at the proper rate, gave the optical illusion of conical third dimension; a psycho-therapeutic whirlpool bath; an imposing display of materia medica; and many instruments the use of which he did not understand. In spite of this ominous equipment he did not feel nervous, for he was already beginning to feel quite at home in Chthonia.

At the first sound of footsteps Miss Gonada quickly put away her puzzle and stood rigidly at attention. A rather large blackbearded man dressed in white walked regally into the room. She genuflected and handed the third Trinitarian the chart. Stroking his beard, Dr. Daft-Ebbtide read the pontifical Latin and the Basic English of his colleagues. He read rapidly and returned the chart to Miss Gonada. With slow, majestic strides he went over to the couch. When Ridgely started to pull himself into an attentive position, the doctor said: "Stay as you are, Mr. Winters." He always sacrificed formalities to the health of his patient. He sat down in a chair which Miss Gonada placed for him. "I'm Dr. Daft-Ebbtide," he said, fixing his patient with the roentgenic eye so characteristic of the trinity.

Ridgely squirmed inwardly under his glare, but steeled himself

against any show of emotion. He felt as if he were shedding layer after layer of ego like some mercenary strip-tease performer.

Miss Gonada stood by with notebook in hand as Dr. Daft-Ebbtide began his preliminary interrogation.

Dr. D-E: "Do you understand sex, Mr. Winters?"

R.W.: "Yes, sir."

Dr. D-E: "Please equate the word for me."

R.W.: "S= sperm; E= egg; and X= unknown algebraic quantity."

Dr. D-E: "Good. Now give me the composition of the specie known as *Homo Sapiens*."

R.W.: "A physio-chemical entity found specifically on the barbaric planet, Earth."

Dr. D-E: "I see you have studied science, Mr. Winters. Now, name the seven cardinal virtues."

R.W.: "Promiscuity, Hedonism, Atheism, Abortion, Carnality, Eroticism, and Militarism."

Dr. D-E: "Good! Where did you learn your catechism?"

R.W.: "Oh, I learned that back in my terrestrial days, sir."

Dr. D-E: Please repeat the following after me as rapidly as you can:

*Six sthenic schizophrenics
standing in a seminal sea."*

R.W:

*"Six sthenic schizophrenics
standing in a seminal sea."*

Dr. D-E: "Now Mr. Winters, answer the following questions with yes or no: Was your leave-taking of

the planet Earth self administered?"

R.W.: "Yes, sir."

Dr. D-E: "Did you know about Chthonia?"

R.W.: "Yes, sir—vaguely."

Dr. D-E: "When you awakened, did you think you were in hell?"

R.W.: "I wasn't sure, sir."

Dr. D-E: "Don't you know there is no such place?"

R.W.: "Yes, sir. I was reasonably sure; but after having lived on the planet Earth—"

Dr. D-E: "I know what you mean, Mr. Winters. Have you had any doubts about Chthonia since your arrival?"

R.W.: "No, sir."

Dr. D-E: "Is it not true that one reason for your leaving the planet Earth was your sense of having committed what the Terrestrials call a crime?"

R.W.: (turning his face away from his interrogator) "Yes, sir."

Dr. D-E: "Aren't you aware, Mr. Winters, that there are no such things as *crimes* and *sins*?"

R.W.: (facing the doctor again) "I am beginning to see the light, sir. But this deed. . .the child's face. . .I was haunted by it—"

Dr. D-E: "I understand, Mr. Winters. You will be made to see this act in its proper light and then you will see the folly of Terrestrial delusions. With your cooperation, very little therapy will be needed."

R.W.: "Thank you, sir."

Quickly, with atheletic elasticity, Dr. Daft-Ebbtide stood up. Miss Gonada appeared instantly at his side. Stroking his beard, the Doctor said: "Prepare for routine chthonotherapy, Miss Gonada." "Yes, sir." She went immediately into action, pressed a button, and started the mesmeric wheel on its third-dimensional revolutions. Ridgely was instructed to sit in a chair facing the wheel. When he was seated with his arms resting comfortably on the arms of the chair, Dr. Daft-Ebbtide came over and stood by him. "Now, Mr. Winters, please keep your eyes on the wheel—and relax."

Ridgely could not keep his eyes off the wheel. It was as if his eyes were pulling his body down the endless depths of an infinite cone. The whorls of black lines on a white background seemed to trail off into astral infinity. He grew drowsy.

*"Fade far away and quite forget what thou amongst the leaves hast never known. . .the fever and the fret. . .there. . .where men sit and hear each other groan. . .this is Chthonia, Mr. Winters. . .this is Chthonia. . .this is Lethe. . ."*He could hear the Doctor who was standing somewhere on the rim of the cone whispering, echoing, somnolent words down the long conical corridor to his ear.

Sleep.

"All right, Miss Gonada."

With practiced skill, Miss Gonada pulled a rope suspended from a

large mechanical crane above their heads. At the end of the rope were two well-padded metal bracelets. The machine gave a ratchet sound as she pulled the rope over to Ridgely and fastened the bracelets about his ankles. He did not move from the depths of his profound sleep. When the bracelets were securely locked about his ankles, she went to a wall panel covered with rows of buttons. She selected one and pressed it. Instantly a winch began to curl the rope into the entrails of the crane, and soon the somnambulistic Ridgely was hoisted, feet first, into the air. He dangled for a moment in the center of the room just above Dr. Daft-Ebbtide's head, who was sitting at a small table writing notes in Esperanto. Miss Gonada pressed another button and the dangling patient was shifted to a position directly over the whirlpool bath. He was allowed to hang there for a moment until his body stopped swaying. Then, another button pressed, he began the descent into the maelstrom. His head was completely submerged in the warm waters of Lethe. The whirling water began its psychic therapy.

After Miss Gonada had dipped the patient three or four times into the whirling Lethe, Dr. Daft-Ebbtide looked up from his case history and said: "All right, Miss Gonada, I'm ready."

The purring winch pulled the

body from the whirlpool and held it once again in mid-air. Another button pressed brought the body over a heavily cushioned operating table. With human deftness, the machine lowered the body to the table and the taut rope immediately became limp. Miss Gonada removed the bracelets from his ankles. The patient did not move a muscle.

The Doctor got up. He waited by the operating table until Miss Gonada brought him a red, highly embellished headpiece strikingly shamanic in appearance. He bent his head forward while she, tiptoeing and stretching her arms to his great height, reverently placed the headress on his bushy pate. Many strange symbols known only to Chthonians adorned the headpiece. Finishing this procedure, she genuflected and offered a few *Ave Sigmunds*. Then she turned her back to the operating table. This was a rite none but the trinity could witness.

Dr. Daft-Ebbtide looked down at the cadaver-like form on the table. Raising his hands above the body, he lifted and lowered them rhythmically as if invisible cords were attached puppet-fashion to the sleeping figure. He continued this motion silently for a few minutes. His head tilted backward a few inches, his eyes closed, and words, visible at first only on his lips, became audible.

I . . . third of the sacred trinity of . . . Chthonia. . . Chthonanalyst Sup-

reme. . . Exorcist Emeritus. . . Honorable Head of the College of Chthonia. Consulting Hypnoanalyst and Surgeon Elect. . . do here and now. . . by the power vested in me for such uses by Sigmund. . . pronounce Anathema. . .

A long silence followed during which the trinitarian continued the motion of his hands. So moved was Miss Gonada by the profundity of the ritual that her excited breathing was audible: but only in her mind's eye could she behold this esoteric rite. She stiffened when she heard the Doctor's voice again.

Out, out brief complexes. . . atavistic impulses. . . terrestrial delusions of God and Devil and Hell. . . Burn fire. . . cleanse water. . . Hence vain deluding religions. . . the brood of folly without father bred. . . foetal exuviae. . . go dwell in some terrestrial brain. . . this is Chthonia. . . This is Chthonia. . . destroyer of Sodom and Gomorrah. . . sinless. . . resurrector of minds. . . redeemer of lost complexes. . . restorer of basal metabolism. . . physio-chemical resucitator. . . This is Chthonia. . . VIVE

Chthonia. . . VIVE Chthonia. . .

The trinitarian dropped his passion pitched tone and went immediately into a long series of *Ave Sigmunds*. He seemed pale and exhausted from the arduous ritual. He breathed heavily. He looked down at the silent figure on the table and saw a cleansed vessel, a purified terrestrial who was now an accepted Chthonian. There lay the handiwork of Sigmund.

Miss Gonada turned around. Tears were in her eyes. She looked at the placid face of Ridgely Winters as if he were a corpse. She made the customary triangular-circular sign and muttered a few more *Ave Sigmunds*. She lifted her eyes to the face of the third trinitarian and beheld him in all his glory— a tired but triumphant figure. He returned her gaze, allowing for the first time a glint of affection to show through his regal exterior. In a voice quiet, but firm and commanding, he said:

"Let four Hypertonalnymphomaniacs bear him away for classification. . . ." ●

SUBSCRIBE—COVEN 13





the Shadow Trader

By Wylly Folk St. John

Illustrated by William Stout

Have you checked your shadow lately? Has the sun been shining? Are any large buildings going up in your neighborhood? If so, don't stand around gawking, or the Shadow Trader may just make a deal—behind your back!

I work for a crazy man, but in the newspaper business they call Colonel Powell a genius.

He makes *The News* the biggest circulation-getter in the south on wild stunts, outlandish gimmicks that readers with good sense wouldn't fall for. But our readers love seances in the city room and elephants in the elevator. The Colonel knows how

to keep a picture editor jumping.

So when he promoted the Crypt of Culture, for the cornerstone of the new \$20,000,000 *News Building*, it was fairly routine stuff. His wasn't the first, of course; there was the Time Capsule at the World's Fair and the Crypt of Civilization at some obscure progressive college in Georgia. But his was the latest.

He put in various items of our present-day culture—household, literary and scientific—including, naturally, the latest edition of *The News*. The Crypt was to be opened in 2100 A.D., to give the people of the future, if any, a good look at our past. It was placed far enough underground to be secure from nuclear bombs. Specific directions on how to find it were buried deep in lead caskets at various places on earth, in all known languages, including Esperanto, so that historians of the future would be sure not to miss it in case civilization hereabouts was totally destroyed.

The crowd at the laying of the cornerstone surrounding the Crypt was an enormous one. The ceremony was at high noon. The Colonel had the Mayor and the Governor each making a speech, and the Archbishop of the Diocese giving the whole thing his blessing, with twenty drum majorettes twirling around him. All on TV., and bounced off a satellite to far places.

But after the crowd left, I noticed that there was one man who didn't drift away with the rest. He was a young fellow of about twenty six, thin and pointed-faced, with shaggy dark hair. He was standing across the street from the site where the new building would be, staring at the cornerstone spot, his face a study in desperation.

The reason I was interested in his desperation wasn't just the nat-

ural curiosity of a *News* reporter whose job depends on turning in three human interest features a day. It was because I recognized the solitary man. I even remembered his name—William Fuller. He was a patient I had seen at the State Mental Hospital when I was down there on a story several days before. His odd delusion was that somebody had stolen his shadow. It was a cloudy day; so he could prove it.

Well, the day of the cornerstone-laying was cloudy, too. I went across the street and spoke to him. "How are you, Bill? Did they let you out, or did you just walk out? And what are you doing here?"

He surprised me. "I was looking for you." I hadn't thought he would remember who the man was with the superintendent and the photographer that day. But they can fool you. They can show real intelligence—as sane as anybody, except for that one little thing.

"What for?"

"I thought you might help me. If I gave you a good story. One that no other paper would have." He was entirely coherent; nothing about him appeared psychotic, unless it was that despair in his eyes.

"How could I help you?" I didn't have even one human interest story that day. This might do for a small one. "Why don't we go into Barney's here and have a cup of coffee, and you can tell me about it."

"Okay." He let me order the coffee before he began. "You've got to help me get back my shadow. I'm going to die, if I don't. That's why I had to run away from the hospital. I'm not a mental case." He leaned forward, his eyes fixed in dread certainty on some prospect past my shoulder. "It sounds insane but it's true. So many strange unbelievable things are really—facts."

"Why there's black magic going on right here in this town. I heard Voodoo drums down on Wayman Street the other night. There's a shop where they sell black candles, for the Black Mass, and prayers written backwards. Yes, and toad's bones and powdered newts and mojos, too."

I knew the shop. We run a feature about it every six months or so. The man who owns it is a phoney Dr. Fu Manchu, but he's good copy and he doesn't care what we say about him.

"And there's a shadow trader down on Wayman Street."

I drank my coffee and watched him getting more and more excited.

"And what is a shadow trader?"

He didn't answer directly, with any definition. "The architects in this town," he said solemnly, "are just as superstitious as if it were the Middle Ages. Oh, they say it's a 'tradition.' Just an old professional tradition that they continue to follow—maybe like the '30' you put at the end of a news story. But the

architects all believe in this one. They don't tell outsiders, but among us everybody understands. I used to be an architect."

"Understands what? What is the tradition?"

"Didn't you ever see anybody put a ruler in a cornerstone?"

"Why, come to think of it, my boss put one in the Crypt today," I remembered. "I thought it was to show the people of the future how advertising was put on everyday gadgets. Does it have some special significance?"

"The ruler is used to measure shadows," he said gravely. "Every building has to have a shadow in its cornerstone, or it will fall down. The measure of the shadow serves instead of the actual shadow. That's why a big city like this can support a shadow trader. He measures shadows and sells them for cornerstones. Architects won't admit it, of course, but they all buy them. They'd have told your boss he had to have one. The trouble is, the shadow trader sometimes has to steal the shadows he sells. He stole mine."

I made appropriately sympathetic noises, and William Fuller went on. "In the old days, it was a slave's body they buried—sometimes alive—in the walls of a building, to make it strong. Then they got onto shadows instead. A person's soul is supposed to be in his shadow. That's a primitive belief, yes—but if they measure your shadow and bury the

measure in a cornerstone, you die within forty days."

"If you believe you'll die in forty days," I told him, "you probably will, cornerstone or not. If you don't believe in it, you won't."

He answered, "I *know* I'll die if I don't get my shadow out of that cornerstone."

"What makes you think that's yours?" I was starting to sound as crazy as he.

"He told me. The shadow trader. Mr. Gray."

"Look," I said, seeing how my story, if any, could be vastly improved, "How about taking me to see this shadow trader? I never met a man like that."

"All right," he agreed without batting an eye. "If you'll help me get my shadow back."

"How could I help?"

"Maybe you could get your boss to let me have that ruler he put in it back."

"Maybe." I humored him; they say that's the best way. Sealed until 2100 A.D.

"Well, come on," he said. "If you want to see the shadow trader."

We went far down on Wayman Street, past the Black Magic shop and the Herb Doctor and the Tattoo Artist. Then we came to a hole-in-the-wall with narrow, dirty steps going up. On one side of the stairwell was a sign advertising Madame Ouida, Palmistry. On the other was

nothing at all. The door at the head of the stairs on that side was blank too. William Fuller opened it softly; then closed it quickly behind us, as if to keep a stray shadow from slipping out.

The room was thick with shadows; Mr. Gray had a large stock of them in the dark corners. An obscure window was covered with dust and cobwebs. An old man sat at a desk under the window. He gave the impression of being a foreigner even though I couldn't see his face very well. Only his eyes showed, like little sharp pinpoints of light.

"I told you, Fuller," he said harshly, glancing up as we came in, "there's nothing else I can do for you. I told you not to come back here. I paid you—now stay away."

"You didn't tell me it was payment. You stole my shadow," Fuller accused.

"I gave you what you wanted most in the world," the old man reminded him. "It wasn't, of course, anything you could keep. But you got the woman you wanted, didn't you?"

"She was a bitch," Fuller said. "She left me the second day."

"I didn't guarantee her to be anything but—the woman you wanted."

"You took my shadow when I wasn't looking. I've got to have it back, Mr. Gray. I don't want to die."

The old man said thoughtfully, "It's beyond reach now. You know

that."

Fuller turned to me, pallid and pleading. "You've got to help me, Mr. Whitten—"

I tried. "I've come," I said to the old man, "to try to persuade you. My name's Carl Whitten. Can't you say you're giving him back his shadow? He can't live unless you do—because he *believes* he can't."

"It's out of the question," Mr. Gray said curtly. "He knew what he was doing when he sold it to me. I've already resold it."

"I know. But isn't there some way you can release him from the necessity of dying right now?" I was beginning to believe it myself. The room had that queer authentic weirdness of nightmares. "Couldn't you—if you're a shadow trader—trade him another shadow? For something else?"

"He hasn't anything else I want." Mr. Gray yawned, putting up a long clawed, wrinkled old hand to his mouth, politely. The hair on the back of my neck stood up, quietly but chillingly. That would be true, of course. Once you had a man's shadow—you had everything. But Fuller needed that shadow. The eerie contest began to seem like a challenge to me.

"Look, I'm a reporter," I told Gray. "I think I can make a good story out of shadow trading. It's not a profession you meet up with every day. Would you mind showing me how you measure a shadow?"

"It's a trade secret," Mr. Gray said. "I could show you, off the record, but—"

"None of this off-the-record stuff," I said. "Anything I can find out, I'll print."

"Fair enough," he agreed. "Of course they'll say it's all a fabrication, you know—you'll get sarcastic letters about it."

"You don't know our readers—they'll write us about their own experiences with shadow traders. Tell me about the things that aren't trade secrets. Anything funny ever happen? You know—odd incidents that make a story more lively and readable—anecdotes, little things."

"Everything that happens in this business is odd, young man," Mr. Gray said. He gestured toward the shadowy corners. "You'd be really surprised, if you knew the names of some of the prominent local executives whose shadows are in my stock. Of course, I'm not going to tell you—unless you want to buy the information with your shadow."

"Nothing doing," I said hastily. Of course I didn't really believe he could take my shadow and do anything with it, but—

"You won't go very far in the newspaper business, young man," Mr. Gray said, shaking his head sadly. "You'd be surprised how many of the best newspaper men would sell their—well, would do anything for a good story."

"I think I've got a pretty good

story anyhow," I said rashly. "Now when would it be convenient for one of our photographers to come over here and take your picture?"

"They can't take my picture," Mr. Gray said. "No photographers, please."

"Oh, come on," I urged. "You'll get a lot more business, after the story comes out. It's really a free ad, you know."

"I've got all the business I can handle now," Mr. Gray said.

"I'm going to send a photographer anyhow, and see if you won't change your mind," I told him. "Maybe you'd be interested in his shadow. He's led a pretty wild life. A man we interviewed who could see auras around everybody said his was a bright crimson."

"I bet his shadow's pale compared to some of the black ones I've got," Mr. Gray sneered.

Now Fuller plucked at my arm. "How about me? You've got your story, but I haven't got my shadow back out of that cornerstone."

"Sorry," I said. "It doesn't look like we're going to do you any good here."

"Goodbye," said Mr. Gray. . .
"Don't come again."

I tried to, later, as a matter of fact, but I never could find the right dark narrow stairs again. The photographer couldn't find the shadow trader, either. We had to run the story without art. There wasn't even any Madame Ouida, Palmistry,

anywhere on Wayman Street. The city editor thought I made it all up, just to have my quota of human interest for the day. He even thought I hired Fuller to back up my story.

But it didn't matter what the city editor thought, because the publisher believed it. The Colonel, like I was saying, has an affinity for the occult. When he read my piece about poor Fuller and his stolen shadow, and the shadow trader of Wayman Street, he leapt right in, his nose for-what-people-will-read, quivering. He sent a pink memo to the managing editor, saying it was the best human interest story of the year, and to give me a bigger by-line. Not a raise, a bigger by-line. And he called me in, telling me to bring Fuller. "It'll be better than the cornerstone-laying itself," he prophesied.

"What will, sir?"

"Why, when we exume the Crypt, to gove this man back his lost shadow, of course. *The News* is human. We love our readers. No individual is going to suffer for something *The News* did inadvertently. The hell with what it'll cost. We'll get it all back in advertising. And we'll bury the Crypt again afterwards. We'll get twice our original publicity on it. What a stunt! Boy, how would you like the job of handling our publicity all the time?"

"No thanks, sir. I'm just a reporter."

"Well, maybe you're right. You

can do us more good writing straight news like this story. It was a hell of a good story. Like I keep trying to tell them down in the city room, don't bother so much about the accuracy—make it interesting!"

"Does he mean," Fuller said plaintively at my elbow, "that he's going to dig up that cornerstone and give me back my shadow?"

"I sure am," the Colonel said happily. "You bet I am. Just as soon as we can get it on TV."

He did it, too. It was, like he said, bigger than the first time. More people blocking the street. More news magazine teams and TV cameras.

Fuller was very grateful. He let the Colonel make his speech, and then he grabbed the ruler and got away from there, fast. I think he was afraid that when the State Hos-

pital people came for the Colonel they'd take William Fuller back, too.

The weather was still cloudy; so I never did get a chance to see whether Fuller's shadow really was missing or not. It would have been something, wouldn't it, if it had been a bright sunny day and he actually didn't have a sign of a shadow—until he got that ruler back in his hands?

I don't really believe in stuff like that, the way the Colonel does. But—psychic or not—he overlooked one thing he should have thought of.

It was just a coincidence, of course. But when the new *News Building* collapsed before we even moved into it, I remembered.

He hadn't put another ruler in the cornerstone. ●

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CYMRU! GWALLA! CAMBRIA!
In the land of the Cymru only the poets are kings.

*Once again, a few lines of Druidic terror
from COVEN'S Welsh minstral*

MOORFIRE FOXFIRE

In the mind's reptilian eye
three demons dwelt:
For the eyes of celebrants
That chanced to see in the grip
Of Autumn's sorcery,
Whose forest light, and shadow,
polished bones and blasted heath
Dared we wanderers judge our stealth
Their huge hearts beating audibly
Like drums across a putrid waste
As if clamoring for some savage parade
Of Hade's dreaded messengers rising up and out
of horror-pools, death-still in
ancient fens. Now in this sullen dark and
bitter night the Druid flames cut wide a swath.
The three beckon us to follow close
to tarn swamps long lacking for the
bright of sun. We come upon a mercury-hot and
seething pit whose writhings are the Sacrificed.
Whilst overhead the trees stare down
like cluttered figures out of hell.
Suddenly the clanging bell entreats
us watch this demon fair: scaly chimeras bark
hoarsely by, snapping their toes with each dance
round! We, preparing for a feast of diabolic ecstasy
whose nectars never touched our lips, sit gathered
In the evil grove
To wait upon the festival.
Not one of us has peered into
the roiling, spitting pit. Nor reckoned
What its strange allure might deem.

Through the blue shadows lurk our
hosts, their snouts engraved with liquid flame
jowls wet with slime, they bade us follow them,
and wagged their tails and stood upon
the ragged edge. We looked upon the
holocaust and guessed the logic of it all.
Stammering, then; our screams mocking us,
we stand delirious, stone cold, half-crazed.

Our hosts, no longer Druids,
slavering, say, it was for us, their guests,
This great fire blazed.

—Walden Muns—

plaid cymru!

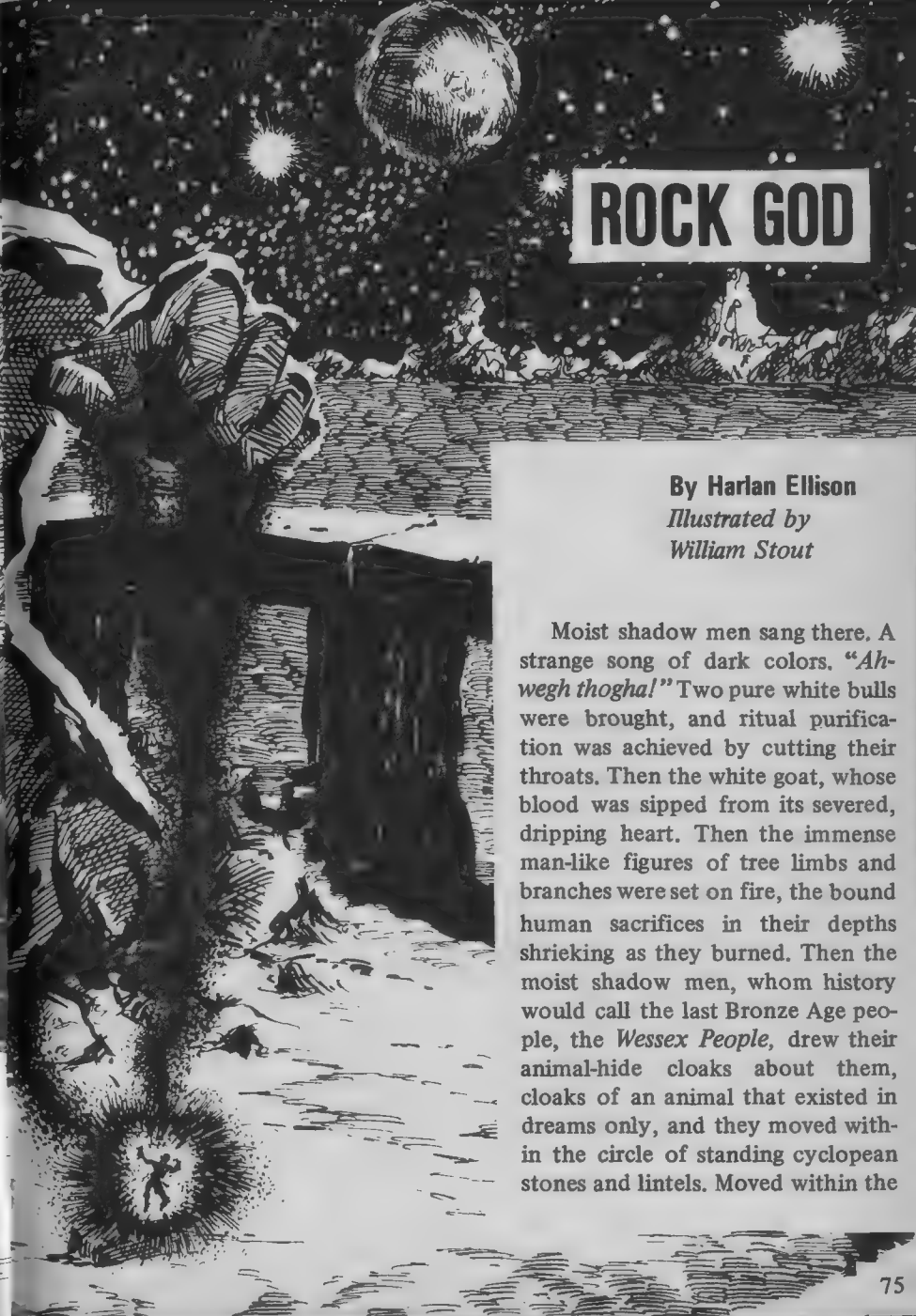




ROCK GOD

By Harlan Ellison
Illustrated by
William Stout

Moist shadow men sang there. A strange song of dark colors. "Ah-wegh thogha!" Two pure white bulls were brought, and ritual purification was achieved by cutting their throats. Then the white goat, whose blood was sipped from its severed, dripping heart. Then the immense man-like figures of tree limbs and branches were set on fire, the bound human sacrifices in their depths shrieking as they burned. Then the moist shadow men, whom history would call the last Bronze Age people, the *Wessex People*, drew their animal-hide cloaks about them, cloaks of an animal that existed in dreams only, and they moved within the circle of standing cyclopean stones and lintels. Moved within the



dark circle of Stonehenge, and swayed back and forth, murmuring their prayers.

Naked, cold so cold in the winter wind, the great priest stood on the altar stone, and hung down his arms, and let his head droop forward, and invoked the loftiest, the lowliest prayers. To Dis.

On the slaughter stone, the head of the virgin was turned toward the altar, and her shadowed eyes seemed suddenly afire with love of something unnameable. The lesser priests held their ritual knives ready.

Away on the altar stone the great priest called Dis. Begged *him* to come. And there was sound in the earth. And there was sound in the stones. In the great stones. And there was sound in the rocks.

When the priests kneeled to the girl who smiled and whose moist mouth silently begged for climax, and they did things to her, and then carried the meat to the altar stone, laying it at the feet of the great priest. While the worshippers swayed and invoked their god.

Darkness flowed as the sounds of great heavings in the rocks grew louder. Then Dis came. Great, dark Dis came. They stared through the massive archway toward the heel stone. The first faint glimmer of sunrise splashed its polished dome with the unclean water of the blood sea. And the heel stone began to change.

Dis came from the earth that was

his flesh. The rock that was his bone. The stone that was his home that was his essence.

The sunrise ceased. Night came again. Washing up out of the earth, darkness flowed and roiled and the world went dark as Dis came from the rock.

The heel stone shifted shape and grew, and rising from the inanimate stone Dis took form. Hairless flesh as solid as mountains. The great corded legs ran like lava, flowing toward the sinister circle of Stonehenge. Flowed, and touched archway, trilothons, sarsen stone, slaughter stone, lintels, bluestone horseshoe. . . and they fed the body of Dis with their substance, and he grew. Massive, enormous, rising into the night that oozed up from the earth, as darkness covered the world. Greater than the stones, taller than the huge branch-figures wherein had burned the human sacrifices. Two hundred feet, towering over the awed and supplicating Wessex People.

Dis, rock god, had come again as he had come one hundred years before, and one hundred years before that.

Words brought him. Needs brought him. Fear of *not* bringing him forth from his own body, the earth, had brought him. Belief had brought him. Now, again, as it had brought him once every century, to the low-fallen ones who worshipped him: not because he promised life after

death, not because he promised salvation, not because he promised rich harvests and plentiful rain. Dis was not a God of promise. He was called forth because he would come, called or not. Because he was Dis, and his body was the very ground they walked, and they could do no other. Because it was necessary for him to stride the world once every century. There was no human explanation for his need. . . he was Dis. . . it was reason enough.

More. Darkness seeped up into the skies. The world was dark. He rose, greater and greater still. Stonehenge vanished to become his legs, his torso, his arms, the terrifying shape of his head. Stonehenge fed his bulk and he loomed over them.

A cry of hopelessness, low and animal, came from the Wessex People. From the throat of the great priest and his assistants, and from the throat of the acolyte priest whose name was not yet recorded.

The great priest murmured his words, incantations he had been taught would keep Dis from harming those who worshipped him. There was no way for him to know: they had no effect, they were no protection. Dis had never *desired* their destruction, so they had been spared. Yet they believed. Helpless, yet they believed. And. . .

This rising was not like the others that had occurred in the thousand centuries since Dis had first appeared.

The great priest sensed it first; then the acolyte. The others were frozen, uncomprehending, waiting.

The great horned head of Dis turned; the rock god peered through the eternal darkness that flowed upward from the Earth, as if seeing the stars that were now hidden from all but his sight.

Then the face turned down and for the first time Dis *spoke* to men.

I will sleep.

They listened. Fear greater than the fear they had always known at Dis's coming gripped them. They had thought in their dim way there was no greater fear, but now Dis *spoke*. The sound of volcanos. The sound of winds. Caverns. Pain. Vapor exploding through stone.

I will sleep and dream.

I will be safe.

I will give you a thing.

Possess it.

The holiest of holies.

I sleep within.

And Dis reached into his body, thrust his taloned hand as big as the biggest trilobite into his body of rock that was flesh, and brought forth a mote of burning blackness. He held it up to his flaming eyes. Vistas of the underworld leaped and scintillated in the fire-pits of his eyes. The black light of the mote met the flames of his eyes and the light melted and merged and leapt and the fire entered the mote, and crimson became blackness and blackness became crimson, and then all

was within the mote, and it pulsed, pulsed, waned, subsided, lay quiescent.

Then Dis bent and lowered his hand, laying the mote at the feet of the great priest.

Keep safe my soul.

I will come again one day.

Unending pain if my soul is lost.

This is my command.

The great priest feared to look up, but his words were to his god, to assure him the life of all his people would be spent protecting the holiest of holies.

But suddenly there was a bold sound from the throng of petrified worshippers, and the great priest had a moment's presaging of terror as the young acolyte priest—who could not wait for succession, who lusted after power *now*—broke from the mass of dark praying shapes, raced across the open space and leaped onto the altar stone.

"No!" the great priest moaned.

"Great Dis!" the acolyte priest shouted, looking up into the face that his race's memory would never be able to describe without a shudder. "Great Dis, we have served you for centuries! Now we ask a boon! I, Mag, demand for your faithful ones who pledge to protect your sleeping soul, the boon of——"

None ever knew what token the acolyte might have demanded to raise himself to a position of power. The rock god reached down and darkness flowed from his taloned

fingers. Black fire consumed the acolyte in an instant, and the pillar of black fire sparkled upward, thinned, and became a lance-line no man could look into. Then Dis hurled the black fire into the ground, where it burned through and could be seen to shimmer. The sound of Mag's soul shrivelling was a trembling, terrible thing.

Then Dis flowed back into the earth, the rocks became rocks once more, Stonehenge solidified, and all that remained was the power stone, the black mote stone, at the feet of the great priest, whose body shivered and spasmed from the nearness of the god's vengeance.

And when Dis was gone, to sleep his sleep of ages, the Wessex Folk saw there was a new rock in the Stonehenge circle. In its surface was imprinted the memory of a face that had belonged to one they'd known, contorted in agony beyond their ability to describe. But they would never forget: Mag, in the stone, striation lines of anguish, forever he would live in pain, dead inside the rock, forever blackly burning in agony, with his unvoiced demand.

They took the mote and kept it holiest of holies, and Dis slept.

Dis, most cunning, had separated himself seven times and one more. To let his flesh sleep with his soul was to permit the chance of destruction. His soul slept within the black mote of Stonehenge. But his

flesh he cut seven ways, and there were seven risings, all on the same night. From the mystic number seven, from the seven unearthly risings had come seven stones to match the mote. They came to be known as the Seven Stones of Power. They were known to the world, for Dis knew a god exists only if there are believers; and as he must sleep, for reasons known only to gods, he must leave behind a legacy for legend, by which he would be remembered.

The Seven Stones of Power:

In Ireland, the Blarney Stone.

The Stone of Scone that came from Scotland and now lives beneath the Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey.

The great religious symbol of Islam, the K'bala in Mecca.

The Koh-i-noor diamond, which the Persians called the Mountain of Light.

The lost Stone of Solomon that had vanished from Palestine and which was said to be the most treasured possession of the Dali Lama in Lhasa.

The Welsh Stone of Change—which some called merely the Plinth, for time and legends shimmer in the memory of the frightened—that had last been known to reside at the vacant seat of Arthur's Round Table, the Siege Perilous, the seat and Stone that could only be claimed by the predestined finder of the Holy Grail.

And the Amida of Diabutsu, the Great Buddha, in the Sacred Temple of Kyobe in Japan-that-was.

These seven. And the soul mote.

Legend and the ways of men kept these potent stones secreted. Yet there were chips, and bits, and from *them* came the Great Seal of Solomon, the silver crescent of the Great Anthrex, the Talisman of Suleiman the Magnificent, and the Circle of Isis. But they counted for little, despite their immense power.

It was the seven stones, and the soul mote in which the essence of Dis dreamed his sinister dreams of worlds where great lizards carried on commerce, where living light in the skies ruled creatures of flesh, where the gods drew breath that cleft the earth to its molten core.

The soul mote was buried at Stonehenge, and time passed till even the *Wessex People* were gone, and their having passed that way was forgotten.

This is what happened to the black soul mote.

It was dug up by one who came in the night and was mad. And so, mad, he was not afraid. But his madness did not deter the terrible death that came to him, the flesh stripped from his body and eaten by things only partially human. But he had already traded the mote to one of Minoan Crete. That one passed it for great wealth to a thinker of Mycenaean Greece from whom it was taken in ransom by a priest of

Isis. The Egyptian lost it to a Phoenician and he, in turn, lost it in a game of chance that took all he owned, as well as his life. . .

From hand to hand it traveled, down through the centuries, with death and shapes in the night following its journey.

A thousand hands, a thousand men of cultures shrouded in antiquity. Till it found its way from an ocean floor to the hand of an adventurer who also worked in silver. He cleaned it and polished it and mounted it. Then women owned it.

And each woman became famous. The names are legend. But always they coveted more, and finally reaped their rewards in blood. The soul mote came across another ocean, where it went from the treasure hordes of Osmanski Cossacks to the coffers of Polish noblemen, from the doweries of Parisian *demi-mondaines* to the chamois goldsacks of English vicars, from the pockets of cutpurses to the New World.

And there it passed from brooch to pendant, from ring to lavalier. . . and was lost.

. . . and was found:

by a Croatian workman who had no idea what it was, and threw it with a spadeful of refuse, into the hollow center of the cornerstone of a great skyscraper.

And the building rose one hundred and fifteen storeys over the sleeping soul of the great rock god

Dis. Who knew the time was approaching.

Night hung crucified outside the ninety-fifth floor window of Stierman's office. The night and the men in the room seemed as one. They both accused Stierman. His mouth was dry. He knew at least two of these seven were with the Organization. But which two were deathmen of that "business firm" and which were merely angry entrepreneurs, he did not know. But all seven had partnered him in the construction of the Stierman building. And any one of the seven could ruin him.

"We were all served today," one of them said. He slapped the summons from the District Attorney's office on Stierman's desk.

"You'll pay for this." It was the one with the reptilian eyes. He was frightening. Stierman could not speak.

"How much did you skim off, Stierman? How much?"

That was three.

The other four spoke all at once. "Do you have any idea what happens if this building falls?" "We're all in this together, but it's *you*, Stierman, it's *you*!" "Swiss account, Stierman? Is that where you put it?" "I outta kill you, you scum!"

The building in which they sat was sinking. The foundations had been filled with garbage, with substandard materials; the ground it-

self had been soft. The building was vanishing into the ground. Nothing strange about it, nothing magical, merely inadequate building procedures. Frank Stierman had pocketed almost two million dollars from the construction costs of the building, and it had showed up in the final product.

The second floor was now below street level. Access to the Stierman building was obtained by entrance through a hastily-cut door in the side of a second-floor office. From the foyer and the basement, one had to take an elevator upstairs to get out at the ground floor. The tenants had all vacated. The corporations and professional men had fled. Stierman's seven partners were on the verge of ruin, and the insurance companies had already laughed in their faces.

"Speak up, you sonofabitch!"

Stierman knew he had to bluff it out.

At least till he could get out of the country. Brazil. Then Switzerland. Then . . . anywhere.

"My God, you men have known me fifteen years—have you ever known me to do a dishonest thing? What the hell's wrong with you?" Charm. Trust. Frank Stierman.

He's had an amazing career. Came out of nowhere. One of the biggest developers in Manhattan. Zeckendorf looks like a kid making sand castles next to Stierman. Trust him all the way. Helluva guy. Charming.

Sand in the cement. Quite a lot of sand.

Specifications cut close to the line. Quite close.

A little juice to the surveyors.

A little juice to the building commission.

A little juice to the councilmen.

Over-subsidized. Oversold. Overworked.

Trust and charm. Frank Stierman.

It was working. The wide blue eyes. The strong chin. The cavalry scout ruggedness. It was working. *Which two are patched-into the Organization?* Work, mouth, work this man out of the East River where fish eat garbage.

"Okay, so we've got a situation here. We've got a contingency we never expected. The ground is settling. Okay, we're losing the building. Maybe.

"And. . ." he paused, significantly, "maybe not."

They listened. He dredged lies from the silt of his mind. "I had half a dozen structural engineers in here today, land assayers, men who know what to do with this kind of situation. Now I'm not going to tell you that we're out of the woods. . . Jesus, we've got some rough sledding ahead of us. But we know there was faulty workmanship in the construction, we know the damned contractors who sank the pylons shorted us on the quality of the fill. . . we know we're going to have some losses. . . but we're *friends!* That

counts for a lot. We're going to have to——"

Dis stirred.

Frank Stierman, naked save for loincloth, found his back against a rock wall, found a bronze blade in his right hand, found himself staring across what had been the conference room of his office at a creature of scales and fish-gills that writhed on eight legs with a head of vapor and eyes in the vapor that burned into his own.

He screamed and threw the sword at the thing. . .

Seven men were staring at Frank Stierman. He had no idea what had happened, but he knew he had lost all ground. In the middle of an impassioned plea for reason and patience, he had suddenly fallen back against a wall, screamed like a madman, and lost all tonus in his face. Seven men stared back at him, their resolve now solidified not by anger and suspicion, but by the realization that they were dealing with a lunatic.

The connecting door to Stierman's private office opened, and a woman entered.

"Frank, can I see you for a moment?"

Stierman was trembling. The creature. That head, made of. . . of some kind of *vapor*. . . what was happening to him? "Not now, Monica. This is very important."

"I agree, Frank. *Important*. I have to speak to you *now*."

"Monica, I——"

"Frank, don't make me talk here, in front of these men!"

"You'd better go on, Frank. We want to talk about all this in private for a moment, anyhow."

"Yes. Go ahead, Stierman."

"It's all right. Go ahead and talk to her."

Oh my God, dear God, it's falling apart!

When the door was closed behind him, Stierman turned to his wife and said, "Why are you doing this to me? You know what's at stake in there."

"I'm getting out, Frank."

"Don't be a bitch."

"I'm getting *out*. That's the bottom line, Frank. I was served today, by the District Attorney's office. . ."

"Don't worry about a thing. I had structural engin——"

"Don't lie to me, Frank. I know you too well."

"I'm *not* lying."

"I'm going to help them, Frank. They said I wouldn't be held responsible. They know you got me to sign my name on the contracts as a dodge. I can't go through any more of this with you, Frank. After the southern thing, I thought——"

"My God, Monica, don't do this to me! Look, I'm begging you."

"Stop it, Frank."

"You're pregnant, you're going to have my child, how can you do this to me?"

"That's the reason, Frank. Be-

cause I am pregnant, because I can't let a child come into the world with you for its father. I'm getting out. Now, Frank. I came down to tell you, so you wouldn't count on me when you talk to those men. Save yourself, Frank."

She turned to go. He reached across the desk and lifted the obsidian bookend and took three steps behind her. She turned just as he raised the weight. Her eyes were cool, waiting.

He slammed the bookend across her forehead.

She stumbled back, head jerking as though struck from three different directions. Her head opened and the white ash of bone was suddenly coated with blood. She flailed back, eyes glazing, and crashed into the dark window. Then the glass bowed, gave, and she was gone, silently, into the night.

Stierman dropped the bookend. His arms came up and his hands groped out before him, shaking violently. He twitched with cold, a sudden cold that came from a place he could not name. Gone, she was gone, he was alone.

The words burned on the teakwood wall.

AH—WEGH THOGHA!

He wanted to scream, but the trembling was on him, the insane twitching that he could not stop. His body was helpless in the spastic grip of the seizure. Gone, she was gone, they were in the next

room, the building going down down into the earth, those words, what were those words. . .

"Ah-wegh thogha!" His throat had never been formed to shape those words, but it did.

Dis woke.

He hungered for his body.

Time is a plaything for the gods. It only has substance for those who use it. Men fear time and bow to it. Gods cup it and mold it and use it.

Time ceased its movement.

Dis called for his body.

From seven far lands they came with the stones. From deep within the earth two of them were brought, by creatures that did not walk. From Mecca the worshippers defiled their own temple with theft, and brought it. From across the lost snow lands of Tibet they came with yet another. Seven great religions were gutted. Seven sources of power were lost. All in the moment without time.

Came, and brought with them the seven stones of power, the body of Dis.

To the skyscraper in Manhattan.

And Dis took back what had always been his.

Within the cornerstone the black soul mote glowed and pulsed with the undying fire that lived within. The mote grew, and absorbed the cornerstone. It flowed black and strong, mighty and changing, absorbing the skyscraper as it had absorbed the bulk of Stonehenge.

The building shifted, shaped itself, and inside its growing body Frank Stierman knew a moment of madness before he was absorbed into the rock-flesh of Dis. His face, frozen in that moment of undying death, an eternity of broiling insanity through which he would gibber forever. The face of Mag, burned into the stone.

Dis came alive, and replaced his soul.

And rose, and darkness washed

up again from the concrete covered Earth that was his essence.

Above the city the bulk of Dis rose, spraddle-legged, enormous.

All this was rock. All this was flesh of his flesh. All this belonged to Dis, to be absorbed, to permit him to grow as he had never grown before.

To feed Dis.

Now men would know why the rock god had gone to sleep. ●



COVER

READER'S SECTION: COVEN 13

A NOTE FROM COVEN'S COVEN--(THE STAFF):

In our introductory, September issue, we stated briefly that we *wanted* correspondence; that we would welcome praise, criticism, accolades, suggestions, enchantments, subscriptions--and anything that would help make COVEN 13 suitable to the sophisticated, weird, macabre, and slightly zany needs of our potential audience. We have received all that, and more--even some god-awful looking figurines for our charm bracelet.

Kudos! Kudos! Kudos! We love them. We love them. As a matter of fact this end product of our efforts has produces a veritable 'trauma of exhilaration' in all the staff. It sent us jointly reeling from wall to wall, dodging drafting tables, photo-typositors, and the like.

A first report from our national distributor--that all was well on the newsstands of *Chthonia*--plus the many letters of congratulation and comment, plus a flood of manuscripts 'written specifically for just such a magazine as ours,' has underlined the fact that COVEN 13 has *made it*. We are most definitely here to stay.

The standards we have set for ourselves; the general concept of format and content: all will be met to the best of our combined abilities. All this we promise; with the burning of black candles, mixed with a few drops of our editor's blood, and the swearing of the Celtic oath of antiquity: "*Though the skies should fall and the earth to break asunder.*"

And, we submit, you can't do better than that.

We present the following random selection of letters with pride. . .

No space this time for vignettes of our authors; though most would need no introduction. Let's just say that once again we've put together what we think is an excellent selection of stories. From the raised eyebrow department, as it were, of a were-wolf's potential progeny, to a most haunting and nocturnal visit--Enjoy! Enjoy!

Editor: COVEN 13:

'Bravo!' I say to the editor's, publishers, and, most important of all, writers, that make a magazine like COVEN 13 possible. My mind is still reeling over the unbelievable fact that the Sept. issue was the first for your publication. Such quality, in writing, editing, and publishing, is usually the product of many years of publication experience. But your very different magazine must, certainly, be different in all respects.

I predict (via Tarot cards, naturally!) a long publication history in the offing for your high quality magazine, COVEN 13.

Wm. Max Miller
Saltsburg, Penna.

Dear Editor:

Thanks for COVEN 13. It's about time fans of the macabre and fantastic had a magazine they could buy at the local newstand. I collect Arkham House books and back issues of WEIRD TALES and AVON FANTASY READER and your stories stand right beside them. My favorites were "Odile" and "In Markham Town." Concerning the latter, I must say it reminded me of Arkham, the setting for most of the stories by the Master, H.P. Lovecraft. I note that it was in Massachu-

setts and Salem was mentioned. Is it possible author Levine is trying to add to the Cthulhu Mythos? If so, good luck. I also liked the idea of publishing the Keaveny story, as I am a great fan of sword and sorcery also, in particular Robert E. Howard, and I hope you find space for those types of stories, too, as did WEIRD TALES. I might also suggest trying to get some material by the older authors, such as Derleth. That way you might attract older fans, who remember them from WEIRD TALES. Any Lovecraft or Howard that you might publish would, needless to say, meet with my hearty approval and that of many others. Another suggestion is British author J. Ramsey Campbell who has already been published by Arkham House.

Patrick Alther
Charlottesville, Va.

To: COVEN 13
Dear Sirs:

Glad to see your new magazine—it looks great. If you do as you say, copying WEIRD TALES and UNKNOWN WORLDS, can't see how you can miss. Since the demise of these two there has surely been something lacking. The serial 'Let There Be Magick,' starts off real well, although in five parts—Isn't this stre-

tching it out quite long? Since you are going to be publishing this type of story, how about getting the fellows who can do them the best—namely—L. Sprague De Camp, Paul Anderson and Lin Carter? Also for those devil stories, can't leave out Robert Bloch. Maybe you could even coax out those two fellow Los Angelesians Ray Bradbury and Richard Matheson to do some new tales as they used to for WEIRD TALES years ago.

And to show you how much faith I have in your publishing venture—enclosed is a check for \$6.00 for a year's subscription—starting with the number two issue.

Ray Reistoffer
Marcus, Iowa

To: COVEN 13
Gentlemen:

Hurray! Hurray! How I have missed WEIRD TALES. Now I just hope there are enough of us readers to keep your good magazine going.

Virginia Steinkein
Des Plaines, Ill.

Dear Mr. Landis:

I am very encouraged, after having read your SEPT. issue of CO-

VEN 13, by your first presentation of what I hope will be a long continuing series of further publications. All the stories were above average, good to excellent, though "I'll Come To You By Moonlight" was slightly predictable.

I have long been a reader and collector of weird literature. COVEN 13 is a welcome addition to a reviving art form.

I offer the best of luck with your publication.

Gregory W. Shepard
Woodland, California

Dear COVEN 13:

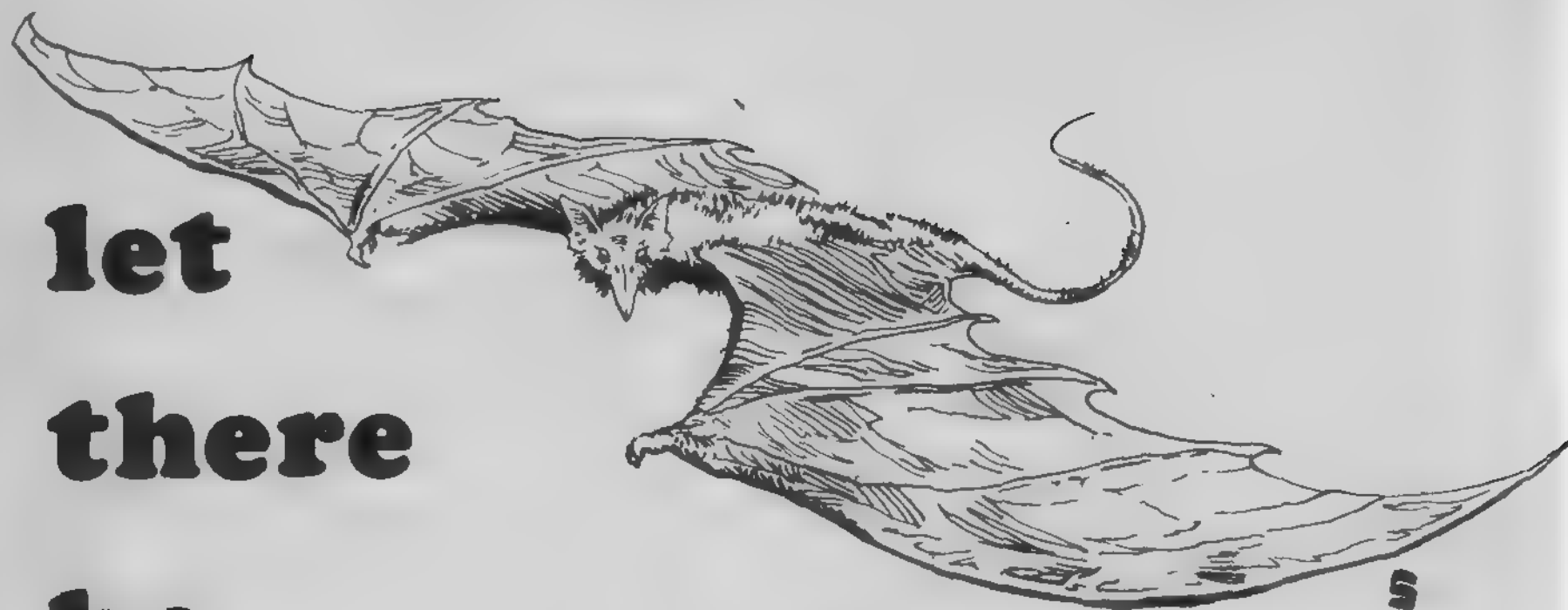
This is positively my first letter to any magazine.

I picked up Vol. 1, No. 1, at a Smoke Shoppe on my way home from the office tonight. Some savage demon kept prompting me to strain my eyes until the last magic word had been devoured.

"Odile" by Alan Caillou is terrific and "In Markham Town" gave me a terrible attack of indigestion after consuming it with huge wedges of pizza pie.

Now, at 2 a.m., still fighting the last vestiges of mushroom-pepperoni pizza and Markham's loathsome horror, I'm writing to you fiendish fellows on the other side of the continent.

Continued on page 142



**let
there
be**

Magick!

By James R. Keaveny

A serial in FIVE PARTS: Part Two—A tale of magic and dark sorcery; of a clashing of swords and a storming of castles. The Planet, Camelot, and a romance to rival Earth's Tristan and Isolde. . . Camelot, where the "black arts" really work. Camelot, the Galaxy's "Sword at Sunset."

SYNOPSIS:

Kyrie Fern, thirty year old Terran graduate of the Galactic Foundation for Controlled Environmental Development of Plus-10 Sentients, is sent as an ADJUSTER to the planet FLEGIS of the Fomalhaut system. Trouble is a-brewing and he has been assigned to help out.

FLEGIS is listed as CAMELOT in Foundation code: this because of a prevalence of MAGICK, dark sorcery and the like—WHICH ACTUALLY WORKS.

"WATCHERS"—opposite-sexed pairs of Foundation agents who act as observers on sentient planets, have informed the Foundation Center that bloody

LET THERE BE MAGICK



planetary war is in the offing. That the situation is perilous in that Camelot's forces for progress as exemplified by the feudal kingdoms of the northern lands, such as Marack, are threatened with total extinction by the dark forces of the southern lands of Om. . . . The problem is that the Galactic Foundation has only the smallest knowledge of the nature of the power of Om. That it exists, yes! That its surface manifestation is simply bloody war between various opposing feudal armies for domination of the planet, yes! But, since the Foundation knows of Camelot's—and Om's—magic, and knows too that the forces of Marack depend not so much upon this power as upon the few existing feudal universities, with rudimentary offerings in the arts and sciences, the Foundation can only conclude that if Marack is destroyed then all of Camelot will likewise go down, and with it such civilization as is now known.

What is Om? Who is Om? And, if magic works on Camelot, what then does this mean for the Science of the Galactic Foundation?

It is planned that Kyrie Fern, in the guise of Harl Lenti, son of an impoverished Earl, or ONUS, will meet the Princess Murie Nigaard, only daughter of King Caronne, ruler of Marack, on the high-road from Castle Glagmaron. He is to prevent her from being abducted by Om's sorcery. It has been decided too, that since Harl Lenti, whose role Kyrie Fern now plays, is one of those who can claim the blood of Marack's ancient hero, THE COLLIN, allusion to this and to Harl as actually being somewhat of a reincarnation of this semi-mythical figure, might give him the authority to further influence the forces of Marack against Om.

On the highroad Harl meets with the Princess—a cute little dollie with purple eyes and golden fur—two knights of her entourage, a maid, and Dame Malion, a lady-in-waiting. The Princess is also accompanied by one of Camelot's strangest creatures—a Pug-Boo. These small animals—they look like Terran teddy bears—have an odd penchant for attaching themselves to royalty, or to prominent people.

After a brief scuffle with the Princess' two knights, Harl fails in preventing the Princess' abduction. Instead, he is abducted with her to Castle-Gortfin, property of the Lady Elioseen, witch and sorceress. While under the spell of this sorcery, Harl has a strange mental visitation from the Pug-Boo, who queries him as to his origin. He awakens in the bowels of the great stone mass of Gortfin and then, together with Rawl Fergis, cousin to, and a member of the Princess' original entourage; the Dame Malion, and the Princess Murie Nigaard, he escapes; this after a bloody battle.

They flee through the night, having with them a herd of "dottles" as spare mounts. These are six-legged steeds, ruminants like horses, but more like dogs in personality and intelligence.

They make all speed to the city of Glagmaron, since it is apparent to Harl that Om's forces are in motion NOW. He has learned that two countries south of Marack have made peace already with Om, and that other countries are warring with each other at Om's instigation: this, plus the abduction of the Prin-

cess, as a part of the total, but still vaguely seen plan.

The little Pug-Boo, missing along with the second knight and the Princess' maid, appears from nowhere, waiting for them on a stone road-marker. They continue driving toward Glagmaron some two hundred miles distant.

That night, just before twilight, they come to a meadow beyond a small river wherein are camped six people with a number of dottles. Two of these, lords or knights by their armor, challenge the Princess and her group to a test of arms. Harl, as the Princess' champion, rides forth. Considering the while that his challenger, who calls himself the Lord, Breen Hoggleftitz, is a pompous, windy, and somewhat fanatical oaf, Harl prepares to do battle.

Continue:

I drew my Sword, let it dangle, hung my head and said softly—but not too softly so that he shouldn't hear—"It is, again, that I do not wish to hurt you, Sir Loudmouth. Have done with it."

"Great Ormon!" He literally roared. "Did you hear him, M'Lady? I cannot now, in all truth, forgive him. With your permission I shall flat him to the turf and beyond, as is my prowess—and I shall do this now!"

With that, and with no more ado, he came charging mightily toward the bridge.

My dottle of the moment was a young female, both graceful and capricious. She weighed at least 300 pounds less than the great beast who bore the hulk of Breen Hoggle-Fitz. And, since Hoggle-Fitz was half my weight again, we were, suetwise, 'heavily' outnumbered. All in all, however, my needling had worked and Fitz was now a mindless bull to my potential as matador. . .

We met at the bridge's end. Hoggle-Fitz, moving forward at expresstrain speed, stood in his stirrups, whirled a gigantic sword and roared again. I, too, stood high in my stirrups. I held my sword loosely until that very tenth of a second when he swung. Then I was instantly down and over to cling to the side of my sweet smelling dottle's belly, while overhead Hoggle-Fitz' metal broke the sound barrier. Rawl swore later that there was actually a 'boom' where his steel had passed.

The very momentum of this mighty sweep turned him halfway around in his saddle. My dottle, under pressure from my legs, simultaneously threw on the brakes so that the two animals were halted rump to rump. It was then that I rose up and almost casually gave the giant a whacking thump on the back of his head with the flat of my sword, so that he fell forward across his dottle's neck. And then, because his dottle chose to move

ahead with this new transgression, he tumbled to the green grass directly before the marvelling figure of the Princess Nigaard.

The collage of whirlwind action then expanded to include the giant's slender companion who, thinking that Fitz was gravely injured, dashed by me and across the bridge to his aid. . . . At which point, in this completely mad charade, Rawl placed himself before the Princess and whacked the giant's companion across the belly with a stiff one, tumbling the slender figure from the saddle.

All action took place in the space of seconds. But the last scene was by far the wildest. Upon sailing through space the woven metal hood of the companion fell back, releasing a veritable wealth of bright red hair, plus accompanying female features to match a most feminine scream of anger.

I was instantly back across the bridge to seize her, which I did, and this beneath the sudden glare of Murie Nigaard. But I couldn't hold on to her. For despite Rawl's tummy whack, her wind was good and her squirming abilities beyond belief. And, too, with Murie watching I dared not cling too tight. Within seconds she was away and after Rawl who had dismounted and started to approach us. He, however, seeing the absolute rage in the girl's eyes, and not wanting to whack such a dainty creature again, took to his

heels.

It was that, I think, that saved us further nonsense. Rawl running in circles and yelling for mercy, though laughingly; the girl in hot pursuit shouting blasphemies which were later most diplomatically overlooked by her fanatic father, Lord Breen Hoggle-Fitz. She finally clipped Rawl's left heel with her toe so that he fell flat on his face; upon which she straddled his back and began to pummel him. Hoggle-Fitz, now awake and sitting up; Murie Nigaard; the four men-at-arms; the Dame Malion and myself, roared with laughter.

It was Dame Malion who finally saw fit to rescue Rawl, and to bring the young lady to her senses so that we all, and without further ado, crossed the bridge, dismounted before the tents and flopped onto the meadow grass before the largest of them. . . .

The three women then sat to one side, making their mutual adjustments to the situation. The red-head had been introduced to us by Hoggle-Fitz—after he had been lifted to his feet, brushed and smiled at—as the Lady Caroween, last of his ten children who, he pronounced sagely, was somewhat of a warrior on her own. This boast caused the maid to blush, Rawl to stutter an introduction of himself, and the Princess and I to button our lips as was appropriate. The four men-at-arms simply smiled and said nothing.

The odd thing here was that never a mention of previous claim to insult, or to any of the events leading to the altercation, was said again. The havits of Camelot being what they were, the culture had of necessity to produce this most peculiar form of safety valve, else the whole population would long since have slaughtered each other.

Over bowls of lukewarm sviss (the local mead), which Hoggle-Fitz had served, along with food, he made proper obeisance to the Princess. And we were told of his reasons for being in Marack.

He had not, nor would he ever, he explained, accept the peace with Om that King Feglyn had proclaimed. He had rejected it, in fact, to the point of open rebellion. Four of his sons had been killed, as had many hundreds of his household. Four other sons and one daughter, together with her husband and children, were now in hiding. And he, Breen Hoggle-Fitz, *Kolb* of Durst in Great Ortmund, had been forced to flee. . .

"How so," I asked, "in this matter of Om? Are there forces of Om's soldiery even now in Great Ortmund? We have heard that they garrison Ortmund's port cities."

"Not so, young Sir," Hoggle-Fitz said. "At least not to my knowledge. Our peace was simply that we would not war with Om, or Kelb, or Kerch, in return for Om's sup-

port in certain claims against Marack which have long existed."

The Princess' eye slitted at this, but she said never a word. Then we told them of the abduction to Gortfin; of the precense there of Yorns, and finally of the pattern that seemed to be developing against Ferlach and Gheese. At this point the Princess did ask about, as she put it, "these so-called claims against Marack, and how Lord Hoggle-Fitz stood in the matter."

He flushed, but answered boldly: "Our King Feglyn is not of his father's blood. Of the 'claims,' M'Lady, I would gladly have gone to war against you to settle them; *but not with the support of Om*. I am somewhat dull-witted at times, M'Lady. But not so much that I would sacrifice all Flegis to Om and to the Kaleen of the Dark Lands—and that is where alliance leads."

I watched the others as they pondered this. And for the first time I was somewhat pleased with the bumbling, pious, boasting—but oh-so-brave and honest Hoggle-Fitz.

We continued in this vein, sparring with words, and exchanging views and sundry *bon-mots* until darkness surrounded us along with a swift and penetrating cold.

We drew closer to the fires, wrapped in our various fine woven saddle blankets.

It was then I noticed that they all seemed waiting for something,

something in which my research had apparently failed me. . . I moved to Murie's side in a gesture of intimacy, and I asked her when she would sleep. She said simply, frowning, as if I should have known, "Well, after, M'Lord—after h ooli plays."

I said nothing more so as not to disclose my ignorance. I withdrew instead to the half-circle of men, facing the women on the other side of the fire.

The Pug-Boo made his appearance. He simply wandered into the circle of firelight, seated his little fat body upon a flat stone and placed a tiny metallic object to his lips. . . Then he began to play a tune.

I watched and listened, fascinated. The Pug-Boo was actually *playing* a musical instrument. *I couldn't believe it.*

The Pug-Boo was an animal, a little fat furry facsimile of a Terran honey-bear with raccoon hands, yet there he sat—There he sat playing music such as I had never heard, nor ever would again, except by Pug-Boos, on any tape, disc, or crystal gage. And I finally knew, too, as I listened to the introductory bars, why "everybody loved a Pug-Boo." Pug-Boos were *minstrels*; the only ones, perhaps, that Camelot had ever known.

The fire-pit gleamed in dancing hypnotic yellows and reds. The night clouds parted and one of

Camelot's two moons, shown all silvery bright through the limbs of the great trese. Light splashed on the placid wash of water of the small river, and on the sheen of the grassy meadow. The dottles, too, stopped their browsing to listen. And they sat around us—thirty of them now—on haunches and at full length, like gigantic dogs at rest. And all was silent.

The music was symphonic a medley of every reed or brass, or string, or pipe that had ever played anywhere in all the Gaalxy. There was no explaining it or its source, or how it was done. I learned later that the Pug-Boo's instrument was a simple hollow tube of some unknown metal upon which no other could produce a single note.

And so I listened—we listened, rather. And my mind was invaded with sound and color which mingled with created mood and imagery; each facte a variation of a thousand themes, all melding, expanding, growing and lessening, to explode in great burstsof light that was not light, in a blackness of space that was not space. And through it all a thread emerged. A story of worlds and galaxies shattered and ruined in seas of cosmic fission; of a holocaust beyond all understanding. There was a repetitive image too—of a humanoid planet resembling Terra, Camelot-Flegis, and ten-thousand kindred worlds. The planet was of an indescribable beauty. And the

events depicted were of its death in the great cataclysm, and a hint of total evil beyond the very limits of time. The suggested horror was so enormous, so all pervasive, as to blast the mind that sought to understand it.

Yet still another thread ran through this collage of imagery and sound. It was one of beauty, peace, and above all, hope. . . And I thought as I listened, that those around me, even the dottles, most definitely would find some measure of themselves here—as it was no doubt planned that they should do. It would be a dim-viewed tapestry, perhaps, of a fairy world which once was theirs, though they knew it not. It would most likely seem to them a personal contact, a gossamer thread of liaison between themselves and the very essence of their gods. There was no precedent for this in the galactic history of humankind, no counterpart in the patterns of evolution. The thought was frightening. For it bespoke the manipulation of the lifeform of a plante; of a system—and *perhaps of an entire galaxy.*

The Pug-Boo was *more* than a bridge to their past, *more* than their *race memory*. . . Somehow I knew that he would play his song until that time when they would understand its meaning; and so that when that time came there would be other facets of the symphony, and a destiny worthy of any gods who had ever possessed the minds

and lives of humankind.

And thinking in this way I realized, too, that what I now knew—that they were of an elder race—I, like the Pug-Boo, could not tell them; that this small scene in which I played a minor role would be but a page of something so gigantic as to numb the reasoning processes. And because I knew this, the music was suddenly fraught with an unbearable pain; with a rushing, all compelling sense of sadness and chaos—of an impending doom which was not just world-death, or *Ragnor-ok*—but the death of life. . .

The others sat and gazed hypnotically into the flames. And on all their faces was a sublime peace, an ecstatic reverie—because they did not know. But I, Kyrie Fern, *Harl Lenti*, the *Adjuster*, “The Collin,” dared not listen longer. I blanked out the music with its beauty and its concomitant horror and waited numb and corpselike until the Pug-Boo finished; until the others laid down upon their respective beds and the fire died and only the second moon shown to define our lonely positions in the meadow. . . Then I, too, slept.

I was awakened in the small hours by the soft wet muzzle of my last charger of the afternoon, the young female dottle. She wheezed softly, making a wooing noise in my ear so that I sat up to see all the dottles quiet, though alert and watching—They stared in the dir-

ection of the road and over the bridge to far Gortfin.

And then I heard the sound—the noise it seemed of a myriad of dottles—of the *Erl-King* of my childhood—all thundering through the night. I awakened Rawl who had slept at my side. He in turn awakened Hoggle-Fitz and the men-at-arms. Then we secured our weapons continued prone and silently watched the bridge.

At one point Rawl moved to alert the Princess, but I cautioned him and he returned to our group. . . Then they were on us.

It was my first experience, my first sight of organized Camelot cavalry. Even though it was night, it was still a beauteous thing to see. On they came, two abreast, short spears at the stirrup, shields slung, swords and other weapons across the shoulders according to their tastes, and their armor all twinkling and tinkling in the moonlight. . . Rawl and the men-at-arms had collapsed our tents so that since they thundered on we had only to assume that they saw us not. Our shadowy dottles, yes! But a herd of dottles, though certainly uncommon, was still, at least in this case, not a thing to delay them.

"Now, by Great Ormon!" Hoggle-Fitz was saying in choked tones. . . "Look you there! Yorns! Yorns and men! Yorns in Marack!" There was such hatred in his voice that I moved to restrain him, but he held

himself in check.

Rawl's expression mirrored that of Hoggle-Fitz, and this was true too of the men-at-arms.

We counted 100 riders and 300 dottles. And at the end of their cavalcade there seemed to be a flying thing, something that passed overhead with great wings, and that left such a stench that all the meadow was filled with it for the space of seconds.

I glanced at Hoggle-Fitz. His eyes were bulging, red now with an absolute insanity. "By all ghe gods," he said in guttural tones, "Om is here, young Sir! *Om is in Marack!*"

"Aye," Rawl echoed him, and his tone was equally fierce. "And never in the history of man has a *Vuun* been north of the River-Sea."

They seemed almost to ignore me then, sensing that I was "cool" and not a part of them. "*They* are resurrected," Hoggle said. "*They* have come again." He began to pray. He rose to his knees, bowed his head and made the double cross of obeisance a number of times. Rawl and the others following suit, I unobtrusively joined them, alert, watching from the corners of my eyes. I tapped my programmed memory and found that a *Vuun* was a creature long thought to be extinct on Camelot-Fregis. It was mammalian, winged, off a fifty foot span and akin to the Terran bat, though with a great beak and rending talons. History had it that in the

ancient wars Vuuns had been used by some forces as allies and cohorts for they were possessed, too, of an intelligence of the order of mankind. . .

"They ride at night," I stated, when the prayers were over. "Their fears are not those of true men."

"Nor should they be," Hoggle-Fitz said, looking at me strangely, "for they are of the dead-alives—or at least of that part of Om's dominion."

"I fear not the night, Sir Lenti," Rawl said with a burst of courage. "And I would follow to see where they lead."

"No," I said. "It is not meet. And we shall know soon enough. Let us sleep again. For whatever the morrow brings—and I truly think that all our morrows will now be like none that have ever gone before—we must be ready."

Surprisingly, they did as I said. And I had the feeling that, for whatever reason, individually or collectively, they had granted me leadership. Hoggle-Fitz was my senior both in station and in age, but he, too, deferred to me. Possibly, I thought, before I too turned to sleep, for the simple reason that I had bested him.

Dawn broke with mists shrouding the great trees and the small river so that the road was not visible from our camp.

The one thing all specie of hum-

ankind on Camelot had in common, other than fighting, was an inordinate compulsion to cleanliness. This fact found us all at the river's edge to plunge and revel in its stinging icy water. After that came a mutual rub-down and sundry pats of fragrant oil in the appropriate places. Then we were off again.

Since the events of the night were still clear in our minds, and since we knew not where the 100 riders had gone, I sent Rawl ahead for a distance of many paces. He would be our advance guard. He was to have four dottles in front of him and four in back as protection against sudden attack. We, myself and Hoggle-Fitz, were to ride with the Princess, Dame Malion, and the Lady Caroween. The four men-at-arms would ride to the front of us. They would be preceded by a half dozen dottles while the remainder of the herd brought up our rear. Thus did we proceed at a brisk gallop toward the castle and city of far Glagmaron—with *one exception*: the lithe and airy, Lady Caroween, still in mesh armor, and with small sword sheathed across her back rode to the front to join Rawl Fergis. She said with a straight face and twinkling auburn eyes, that since she had bested him the day before, it was now most seemly that she act as his protector.

Murie Nigaard smiled at this. And watching her closely, I had the odd impression that though she

seemed softer and less prone to a flexing of feminine muscles, she could no doubt hold her own with any fledgling warrior. . .

I gazed, too, at the Pug-Boo, and with new respect. He stared calmly back at me as if he knew that I had psyched a part of him; had glimpsed a purpose in his being, a small part of the ice berg, as it were. It bothered him not a whit. After holding my gaze for a time he clutched Murie's waist, leaned his fat round head against the small of her back and went to sleep. . .

The mists lifted. Fomalhaut shone brightly: all around us were the scenes and smells and rustlings of yesterday. On a promontory at one point we were calmly observed by a huge six legged striped creature which caused the dottles to roll their big blue eyes and feign indifference in their fear. At another point a great creature browsed in cane thicket and long-grass. It resembled a dottle, but seemed half again in size and strength. It had a massive double horn protruding from the front of its heavy head.

"Hast ever ridden a *Gerd*, Sir Lenti?" Hoggle-Fitz asked, as we passed the creature by.

"I have not," I said.

"I *have*, good Sir, and all that you may know of them is true. They are absolute devils." At this, since he had mentioned the plural name of *Ghast*, Ormon's competitor

for the souls of men, he crossed himself and mumbled a few words.

"They are very Vuuns from *Best* (Camelot's *hell*). But once conquered, they are loyal to the death," he finished.

"Was it so with the one you rode?"

"Aye. And I rode *him* unto death, and that but recently. We fought, I and my supporters, on the fields outside fair *Durst*, which was my fief in Great Ortmund. We fought all one day and into another. And in the end the thousand-man guard of the false king, Feglyn, fresh and unused until that moment, did drive us from the field. And they did slaughter my brave gerd, using two squadrons of spearmen to do it. But even so I escaped." Hoggle-Fitz fell silent then, reviewing no doubt in his mind's eye, that bloody battle. . . I looked back at the great gerd, who in turn, from his far distance, seemed staring calmly back at me. It was indeed a noble beast.

We passed through our first village an hour after dawn; then another and another, spaced but one half hour apart. In each were those who told of a great thudding of dottle paws in the night, and of the mumbled shouts of men. We knew then that Om had passed this way. Almost at high noon we thundered over the lip of a great valley in which, at some ten miles distance

we saw a fair sized town. It was Gleglyn according to the Princess. It was the last town before great Glagmaron, though many villages still lay between. Half way across the plain the north-south branches of a crossroad paralleled a fast running river. We gathered then with Rawl and the Lady Caroween at its apex and sought for signs of where the men and yorns of Om had gone.

Though the tracks of a dewy morning had dried with the sun of noon, the path was easily evident. They had gone *south*. In the direction, Rawl said, of the borders of Gheese—and we wondered why.

We dined in Gleglyn, being ushered through the great walls and into the town by the king's garrison captain, who had been called to the gate. We ate at the town's fairest inn, but we did not linger long. I had suggested, and the Princess agreed, that we make all haste to Glagmaron for, since she had told me while riding of the powers of her father's sorcerers, and since the "sixth hour, Greenwich," had passed again twice with never a burn of the transmitter, I wished immediately a place of *some* safety. I had no doubt that this too would be an illusion like the safety of mists and clouds. But at least we could take stock and plot what moves were available.

There had been much movement through the town. Young knights and squires, student warriors from

the local *Collegium*, as well as those others who were passing through for the 'spring gathering,' thronged the streets. Many were for Glagmaron Castle and the great equinoxial tournament of the morrow. Little had been said of this by Rawl of Murie Nigaard. And I, perforce, assumed that, indeed, it was commonplace. During our lunch Rawl suggested that we enter the lists. I was noncommittal; but Hoggle-Fitz was for some sort of murder-our 'Onset of Fifties,' with himself leading the charge.

Some twenty students most happily attached themselves to our entourage: honored to be so privileged. The troop was assigned to the command of Lord Hoggle-Fitz who spaced them appropriately in front and rear, dividing them with Rawl. For the first time I was truly alone with Murie Nigaard—this with the exception of the dozing Dame Malion, and the sound-asleep Pug-Boo. I used the time to good advantage.

We rode side by side, each dottle matching perfectly the gait of the other. I could tell that Murie was as pleased as I. The feminine arrogance of the day before had waned somewhat. Her glances seemed quite intimate and her countenance most warm and friendly. I sensed, knew actually, that with but the slightest pressure a conquest could be made here, and this, with the memory of her soft-furred figure in my arms in

the race for the entrance to Castle Gortfin, was heady mead indeed.

I told her more of Harl Lenti—all that I knew, in fact. And I hinted at other things. I told her truthfully of the imminence of great danger to all Marack; that somehow I knew this, and that she and I and Rawl, and others, were destined to share an adventure such as had been given to few men in all time. She listened wide-eyed, thrilled. I spoke of memories that were not mine—but which *were* mine; of a knowledge of destiny and fate likened only to that of the old gods before the *Trinity* of Ormon, Wimbily and Harris. . . She believed it all. I half did myself. Then, as our shadows lengthened to the rear the forests parted again to disclose in the distance the great walls and myriad faceted windows of the city of Glagmaron.

We rode so close, Murie and I, that my lips as I talked were at times within inches of the nape of her neck. That she was aware of this was evident, for at such moments she would stare straight ahead, afraid to turn and look at me and risk the chance of further contact. At each instance she heard me laugh softly so that once I caught her smiling too, and knew thereby that we had much *indeed* in common.

The Lady Caroween and Rawl came up once, drew near and laughed together. Murie Nigaard blushed bright red against the gold, and they withdrew as discreetly as they

came.

Other than the hundreds of stone houses and market stalls clustered at the base of mighty, one hundred foot walls, Glagmaron was indeed a fairy city rivalling Glagmaron Castle high on its great hill to the south. I recalled that it was from that same south road that I had first seen it while awaiting the entourage of the Princess. The pennons of the castle were now equalled by those of the city in display, variety, and color. Only those of the king's household were at half mast. This, we supposed, because of the disappearance of the king's most beautiful daughter. .

I signalled to Lord Hoggle-Fitz, my arm held high. He galloped to our side and we broke together from the center of the train and thundered to the fore to join Rawl and the Lady Caroween. Then we rode across the plain to a distance of 300 paces from Glagmaron's mighty gates. We were followed by our men-at-arms, our twenty young knights, and our dottles. At that point we hoisted the Princess' colors, made from silk sundries found in Hoggle-Fitz' baggage. And these, together with those of Lord Hoggle-Fitz and Rawl, caused somewhat of a stir amongst the rapidly assembling squadrons of the great garrison, plus whole coveys of excited citizenry, peering from the walls.

Our dottles wheeed and wooooed, greeting the dottles of the garrison. And it was not long before a young knight in resplendent attire rode forth. He leapt from the saddle before the Princess, made a sweeping bow with cap and outstretched hand, and offered her—as was the custom—her father's city.

As if on cue, heralds appeared. Silver horns blew a medley of pomp and acclaim. And all of us, to the very last dottle, made our weary but proud way into the sprawling, beautiful and feudal sanctuary of Glagmaron City. . .

I glanced to my wrist as we passed beneath the great arch of the gate; noting with some interest that once again it was the "sixth hour, Greenwich."

We rode through the teeming city and beyond to the winding stone-hewn highway that led to the great castle. For one long length of a half-mile or more, it was cut from the very granite cliffs upon which the castle rested, with the awesome sight of the rushing river named the Cyr some hundreds of feet below. The river had not been visible on our approach to the city, being on its opposite side beneath a bluff that fell off toward the south and west.

The city itself, I noted, was like every museum print, sketch, or woodcut that I had ever seen of medieval architecture. There were cobbled streets, and stone, wood, and

slate-roofed houses and buildings. Some were as high as five stories. Here and there was a great square with fountain, statuary, and market; and all of it ringed by the city homes of noblemen and merchants. One great building had carved above its almost gothic entrance, in *Glaedic*, the root language of all Camelot, "Marack Collegium. Home of Scholars, Students, Poets, Minstrals, and Those Who Teach." Below this was a list of courses offered. I had little time to study them since we went by so quickly, but my previous scanning had told me that they encompassed Minstralism—the playing of instruments, the telling of tales, the recital of poetry, and singing; Simple Medicine; Philosophy, as expounded by certain Camelot sages; The Law—And, since this was Camelot-Flegis, "introductory steps to magick, sorcery, and astrology."

Across the great square was another institute devoted to the theology and the Trinity. Despite their parallel existence there seemed to be no competition here.

The Collegium was co-educational. The square was literally filled with groups of young men and girls, all in light dress, with some mesh armor. They were socializing, eating and drinking, or being addressed in single groups by a lecturer or an individual reading from a vellum textbook. Each student carried a slateboard and a small packet of waxed

vellum sheets with stylus and chalk.

I thought as they cheered us with a youthful exuberance, that here, indeed, was evidence of Camelot's real worth. But I remembered too, that though a contradiction existed in terms of the feudal society in which the Collegium was allowed to live, still, it presented no threat to the hierarchy for it was but a mote in the total scheme of things.

Through each of the great squares, as we passed, and all along the great maze of streets too, all hailed the return of the Princess; the students, seemingly, most of all. And *all* hailed the presence of Hooli the Pug-Boo. Hooli sat apart now as he rode with Murie Nigaard. His fat little legs bounced far back on the round rump of the dottle, while his furry round face was wreathed with dimples and a half-moon smile. His eyes seemed to emote, to twinkle, to exude an aura of benign, if not smug benevolence. And I sensed as I watched him and the crowds around us that the role he played far transcended all that the watchers had told us. I was determined to find out why at my earliest opportune moment.

I inquired of Rawl who rode next to me with Hoggle-Fitz and the Lady Caroween, to our rear, as to just what he had majored in at his *Collegium*. For I was aware that all of the sons and daughters of aristocrats attended collegiums for from one to two years. The trades, such as

ironmongers, armorers, weavers, fletchers, tailors, masons and carpenters were left to the sons of burghers, guildsmen, and peasants. The alternative to this *for everyone* was the parochial or theological seminaries of Ormon and the priests of the Trinity.

Rawl looked at me, his blue eyes twinkling. "The lute," he said blithely. "Certain roundelays. A few poems—and a bit of magick. And yourself, Sir Harl?"

I grinned. "The same—except we had no single sorcerer in far Timlake, the nearest city to my village. So I have no magick. But what of yours? What can you do?"

"A spell. A spell for love which lasts two weeks, and can be used three times—plus one other."

I stared steadily at him, one eye cocked querously, until he said sheepishly: "I can turn gog milk into svizz. . ."

"Great Ormon!" I said. "Always?"

"Almost always."

There was an underlying theme to what he said which I sensed immediately, but could not fully grasp. "For a warrior," I said, "in this matter of the svizz, you have a certain value beyond that of your sword. How do you do this?"

"The words, Sir Harl. The words pronounced properly."

"Aye," I said, trying to fathom the hidden meaning here. In forensic magic there was always some-

thing about the *use of words*. . .

He looked at me strangely and his dottle took that very moment to gaze back at him fondly, as did Murie Nigaard, in my direction. No doubt she had wondered how I was making out in this great metropolis of some hundred thousand souls. . .

I smiled boldly back at her and waved and we continued on.

The granite hewn ledge above the Cyr was a section also for meditation and soul-searching since the roar from the Cyr below interfered with all conversation.

But it was soon passed so that finally there was nothing before us but a great field fronting the castle gates. In size it seemed a square mile or more, covered with a velvet carpet of grass upon which many dottles grazed. Here and there were great stands of broad-leaved trees. To our right as we progressed was the field in which the tournament and sundry other battles would take place on the morrow. Silken tents with banners, flags and pennants of heraldry were already spotted here and there around its periphery. On the side of the field nearest the castle a series of interlocking tiers of seats had been erected. And all was covered by a great canvassed canopy.

From moment to moment our ears were deafened by trumpet blasts. This was explained by Hogle-Fitz who said that, as was the custom, when one great lord signaled his trumpeters to blast for

some imagined reason or other, each of his neighbors were forced to follow suit—else, they reasoned, somehow their dignity would be abated. Already certain knights, would-be-heroes, and student warriors were to be seen going over the ground to check it for the morrow. We rode on and through them to the castle gate. These, though there was no moat, were beyond a sudden deep ravine fronted by a portcullis and drawbridge in classical style. Across this now-lowered bridge there thundered a half-hundred knights and men-at-arms to join our already unwieldy entourage.

We were escorted across the bridge and through the gates to find that, once inside, the first great wall was paralleled by a second of equal size. We swung to the right for a full 300 meters before reaching the second gate. Seeing the lay of this I wondered at what would happen within that narrow alley to a horde of invaders who had pierced the outer defense only.

In the ensuing quasi-melee of some 200 weeing dottles and shouting riders in the great castle courtyard we were sorted for bed and station. The circumstances were recognized as such that there would simply have been no chance for a greeting by the King and Queen. We were taken in hand, our dottles—that is, and thereafter went straight to the chambers assigned us.

Rawl claimed me as his personal guest.

After a labyrinth of great stone halls and stairs we found ourselves in the apartment assigned him, befitting his rank as nephew to the queen. It was large, airy: it overlooked a section of the winding Cyr some three hundred feet below. And, because it occupied one of the many jutting cornices, we were also given a view of the great flagstoned courtyard. The rooms possessed wall tapestries, an enormous bed with sleeping furs, a fireplace of immense proportions, and sundry closets and skin rugs. It was quite livable, indeed.

Glagmaron castle, like all other castles, buildings and keeps throughout Flegis-Camelot claimed ownership, too, to a thing few feudal societies in all the galaxy would deem important—*plumming*! The aforestated “inordinate compulsion to cleanliness” was such that long ago a crude pumping device had been invented. This together with the use of sun and rooftop reservoirs, plus a veritable web of hollow cane-pole conduit, gave Glagmaron castle a plentitude of different temperatures.

The adventures done for the moment we showered and soaped in an atmosphere akin to euphoria. We were like a couple of student-warriors fresh from the *collegium*. All this, despite the fact that a part of my mind was apart from the scene

and into the mesh of the job I had to do.

There had still been no glow of stud upon my belt or wrist band—no voice of caution or advice from the metal node within my skull. Then we slept. The bed was large enough for ten. Indeed, the citizenry oft-times slept in just that way.

But again, desired sleep did not come. And when it did, it was forthwith interrupted by the image of the Pug Boo which intruded along with sunlight patterns of laced stonework against the slate slabs of the floor, and the faint wooing of dot-tles from the meadows beyond the walls.

We were in a small star-taxi, the Pug-Boo and I, released (I supposed) from some great mother-ship. We were self strapped into cushioned contour seats while we gazed through view ports and gyrated within the gravitational influence of a great ringed world with a covey of satellites; each with a film of atmosphere.

You can have that one there,” the Pug-Boo informed me lightly. “The one just tacking around the night side. It’s listed as miocene, lower primates only. It’s all yours, you and the Princess.”

“Most magnanimous,” I grunted, accepting the scene as reality.

“You could say that.”

“What will I do with it?”

“Live there, idiot—away from the ‘madding crowd’.”

"Thomas Hardy." I mused reflectively. "It's as if I were talking to myself, Master Boo."

"You are! You are! I'm only the intermediary—the marriage counselor, as it were."

"Great God!" I said.

And we were no longer in the star-taxi. Now the scene was that of a Camelot-Flegis field of grass and trees. *We were picknicking!*

"Would you like some wine?" the Pug-Boo asked.

"Room temperature?"

"But of course."

"Look!" I informed him, sipping a tepid Reisling, "I'm suddenly quite aware that this 'dream', as one might call it, is not exactly of my own choosing."

"And that's indicative, right?"

"Of what?"

"Of the fact that you're something else, Baby."

"What do you want with me?" I asked bluntly.

"To know all there is to know."

"Why?"

The Pug-Boo leaned forward above the white linen and the lunch basket, across which there now marched a file of ants. His little spine was rigid, his round button eyes snappingly sharp—"Because you are not of Flegis, *Great Collin*. And because in the things which will soon happen, you will most certainly die if you do not have my help."

Of a sudden, my flippant, raised

eyebrow, tongue-in-cheek attitude (it was real in part), came an absolute cropper. For something happened. It was as if an icy, soul destroying breeze swept softly over the dream meadow, so that the non-existent sound of insects became truly non-existent. A Monstrous tension grew instantly within me. My features turned hard, stone cold. My pulse beat heavy but fast. It seemed suddenly, in what was left of my mind's eye, that I was shortly to be a most unwilling witness to my own death.

"Oh, say you so," I said slowly in the vernacular, above the keening of that odd death wind. "How would I know then, if my demise is near, that it comes not from you?"

The non-wind in the non-meadow died as swiftly as it had been born. In its place was a great wave, a fog of horror; a mind eating fear of something unfathomable, intruding, reaching out to me, into me, so that the grass and the scene itself began to fade. My dream seemed now a *three way thing*, and the Pug-Boo's eyes became wide, strange, and wavering. A voice other than his—which still was mine—came on with a low humming; a moon-gibbering hysteria—faint but all pervasive. And there were words. But they seemed of a language such as Banshees would have used between shrieks—had they a language, withal. I felt dread sickness seize my body. A nausea encompassed my very mind. It was

such that I had never felt in all my life before. Then the Pug-Boo's features, which had faded, became suddenly solid again. And he was staring, staring; listening, too. Apparently to something I could not hear. He spoke strangely again, *with my voice*, forcing himself into my new dream and my mind— "Awaken, Harl Lenti," he demanded. "For your life, awaken!"

And, imbued with his quite obvious concern and my own fear, I tried to do just that. But it was too late. The soul sickness and physical nausea persisted so that a great part of me wished only to die; to allow whatever was plagueing me to prevail. Then, before I succumbed entirely to this death-wish, a strobe-flashing came creeping into the outer rim of the sickness. It was a sun-laced 3-D of Murie Nigaard. The scene was a section of our trip to Glagmaron, and she was peeping back at me over her shoulder as her dottle forged ahead. Her smile was elfish, but oh, so intimate; her blue-purple eyes and bouncing page-boy bob an absolute of warmth and beauty—Each strobe flash lasted longer. And the nausea and the sickness waned. I helped by concentrating on the face and thought of Murie, *for I knew this was the Pug-Boo's doing*.

Then I awoke.

Though naked beneath the breeze from the window, I was bathed in sweat; trembling, too. I

lay still for seconds, breathing hard. I walked naked to the opened windows, pausing en-route to pour myself a glass of cold water from an eathern jug.

I leaned on the balustrade, drank, breathed deeply again and scanned with hardly-seeing eyes the view below. I had seen, I was sure—albeit it was small enough part indeed—the very "hell" of the Terran world; plus that of all the gods who had ever evoked an opposite of their particular heaven. I thought too, that for this very reason what I had experienced, *had seen*, was not a product of Flegis-Camelot alone. And that if this were true—what then of the force of OM? For the "Kaleen" and the Yorns of the Dark Lands were still, in all sooth, humanoid—indigenous to this planet.

A thought came again, and it was an almost alien intrusion. For I suddenly wondered just what the opposite of Pug-Boos would be... Below in the courtyard there was a great shouting of men, a wheeing of dottles and a blast of a score of trumpets. I assumed instantly that some most important personage had arrived. The fact stirred me not, however. I was determined to know more of the other—and now!

I crossed the room to the saffron-colored, lustily snoring heap that was Rawl Fergis. I shook him roughly so that he came wide awake, almost as I had done.

"Ha, la—" he said, rubbing his

eyes furiously, and then, "Great Ormon! Sir Lenti. Is it time already?" Have the hours so soon fled?"

"Indeed they have 'fled'," I replied. "But not in the way that you mean. I am sorely troubled, Sir Fergis. I have dreamed strange dreams of sickness and evil. And it seems that all that has happened since my mother received her bird of ill-omen will be as nought to the things that will be. Now tell me all of the Pug-Boos, Sir Fergis. For they will play a most important role in that which comes to pass."

As I had done previously, Rawl too, stretched to the breeze, breathing deeply. He then went to the table with the earthen jugs, for there was more than one. He chose the mild cool wine of Flegis, made from the filka fruit: it had a faintly maple taste and bubbled like champagne.

"It would seem," he said sharply to me after drinking deeply, "that after knowing you for four days we still know you nought. *All* know of Pug-Boos, Sir Lenti. Why not yourself?"

"In sooth I do not know," I said—and I answered just as sharply. "But let be! If there are areas in which my memory does not serve me, this fact decrees no harm to you or Marack. If this memory is *not refreshed*, however, then, perchance, great harm *can* come. Trust me, Sir Fergis. Trust me, Rawl! For I am indeed a friend of Marack and of Flegis."

"You are not of Flegis then? Art

from our moons?" His grin was impish.

"Let be," I said again.

And so he told me. And we sat in great fur-draped chairs before a meddling fire and drank jointly from the jug of filka wine, passing it back and forth between us.

"Pug-Boos," Rawl explained, "as your memory would tell you, had you a memory to speak, are sacred in every way throughout all the lands to the north of the River Sea—Though, and this must be understood, they are not of Ormon and the Trinity. To harm a Pug-Boo is to court instant death—and this *to* all and *from* all citizenry. There are but three Boos in Marack; two each in the lands of Ferlach, Gheese, et al. The Boos in Marack are Hooli, who is with the Princess; Jindil, who stays solely with the King; and Pawbi, who resides with the great sorcerer in the snow-lands to the north. In Gheese, Great Dortmund and the like, the Pug-Boos were with the king and the court wizard, always. Hooli, I must point out to you, Sir Lenti, came to us with the birth of the Princess."

"From where?"

He looked at me long and silently and said, "And now I truly believe that what I said in jest was true. You are not of Flegis, Sir Lenti. It remains to be seen if you are of *Best* itself... But somehow I do not think so. *No one knows, Sirrah, where a Pug-Boo comes from.* And he who

seeks to know will most certainly find his death."

"And they are always with our king and sorcerer?"

"Indeed."

"Why, always?"

"Because that is the way it has been."

I mulled that over and then said slowly: "There is a question, Sir Rawl, which we—you and I—must, perhaps, ask the noble Hoggle-Fitz tonight."

"Which is?"

"If the Pug-Boos of Feglyn, king of Great Ortmund, and of his court wizard, have been seen at anytime since the pact with the Kaleen of Om and the Dark Lands."

Rawl's eyes glittered briefly, but he said simply, "Pug-Boos, as your memory would have told you, do not campaign to the wars."

"Aye," I said. "This I know. But since there is no Boo above the River Sea. *Would one remain when the River Sea came north to Marack?*"

There was a knocking then upon the door. Two pages, resplendent in house livery, appeared bearing new raiment for the both of us; though Rawl's wardrobes seemed already overstuffed with cloaks and hose and pantaloons and such.

One of these young men informed us that we were to be received by the King and Queen prior to the great feast, which now honored both the Princess Murie Nigaard's safe return, and the advent of the mor-

row's tournament.

I had thought that we—Rawl, Hoggle-Fitz, and myself—were to be presented during the meal itself. The Princess had so told us.

We were informed too, by this same page, that the hub-bub and bustle which I had heard in the courtyard below had been nothing less than the arrival of the heir to the throne of Kelb, Prince Keilweir. He had come with an entourage of a hundred men at arms and sundry knights. Rumors already sweeping the castle, according to this page, was that this fair prince, in accordance with all custom, would seek the Princess Murie Nigaard's hand in marriage—He meant to bring her home with him.

At this last Rawl glanced quickly at me, but managed to hold his tongue. To hide my own discomfiture—a sudden strange dissatisfaction that I had never thought to feel—I bent quickly to the page's ear and whispered some instructions. At which, he looked at me oddly and withdrew with his companion.

We dropped the subject of the Pug-Boos and dressed, while outside dusk fell swiftly. Rawl had been given a suit of rich dark brown trimmed in heather blue. It sat well with his saffron pelt. I, for my mink black, was given something in ebony and silver, linen undergarments, hose, full shirt with pleated ruffles, boots of a soft and silken leather, and a

thickly silvered jacket, hussar-like in its fit. The final item was a court saber. This weapon, to me, could very easily have been the deadliest blade on all Camelot; but to those who knew only the great broadsword, it was but a weapon of dalliance. I attached it to my many stoned, and also silvered, belt.

Rawl chose to say, while running a comb and oil through my matted but cleanly washed hair (we exchanged this favor), that he doubted that the princess would favor this bold Prince of Kelb. To which I smiled and said that I thought not either.

From our eyrie windows, we could see a true river of torches and lanterns accompanying what seemed to be the wealth of Glagmaron city, plus the knights and lords from all the tents around. There was a wheeing of dottles such as caused the very air to thrum like unto a cloud of locusts. This feast night promised to be a most gala affair.

Then we were ready. The crude water clock gave us the proper time—something on the order of the 4th hour, Greenwich, or 7:00 p.m., *side-real*. Just prior to this moment, the page to whom I had given instructions returned.

He carried a platter upon which was a cup covered with a linen napkin.

I flipped the napkin off and nodded to Rawl. "Gog milk," I said, and I grinned from ear to ear, "I would try your skill, Sir Sorcerer."

He shook his head, saying, "If I had doubted you, Sir, and thought you a thing of *Best*, I take it back. You have a certain childlike humor, Sir, untainted by the blackness of Om."

I smiled and took the tray and held it out to him, upon which he placed his hands to the cup, screwed up his eyes and intoned what seemed a funereal dirge of words, impossible to duplicate. Then he bent over the cup and sniffed.

He looked up smugly.

I raised it to my mouth and sipped. It *was* svizz. He had done it. I smacked my lips. "Not bad," I said.

Then we shared it and left.

Though Rawl knew well the way to the King's reception chambers, protocol demanded that we be preceded by the page. It seemed a full fifteen minute walk, through halls, courtyards and great, tapestried rooms; all well guarded with stalwart men at arms from the household troops. These saluted us smartly, while throngs of citizens and such promenaded and eyed us in bold speculation.

The atmosphere of the king's reception room reflected the attitude of the "royal family"—informal. Splendor was their costume and splendor became them. For it was from there that we, together, would move to the great banquet room.

The Lord Breen Hoggle—Fitz was already present and he gave us a

loud halooo of greeting and seized my hand for pumping. He looked as a great beribboned parakeet so resplendent was his gear. The Lady Caroween was present too, an auburn furred and dainty wisp of peacock. I knew now who had chosen Rawl's brown and heather clothes, for they matched the Lady Caroween's attire. This last was doubly apparent for she seized upon his arm possessively, while he gazed back at me in feigned helplessness and woe.

But Hoggle-Fitz, the Lady Caroween, Rawl, the King and Queen too—all faded before the utter ethereal and ectoplasmic iridescence of the gold, milk, and purple apparition that was Murie Nigaard. The one thing the Galactic Foundation had *not* prepared me for was that I should be so smitten. At that very instant had the princess but crooked her finger in acquiescence, I would single-handedly have taken on the Prince of Kelb and all his entourage.

I dropped to one knee instead, shook my head of silvered cobwebs and sought composure. I brushed her small hand with my lips. Peering up at her to speak I saw that my attire, countenance, physique, general person and twinkling contacts had had a like effect, and mayhaps more. For I was the object of a possessive female gaze such as I should never hope to meet again.

And her thoughts affected her person. For when she sought to speak, to say: "Arise, Sir Lenti, it

is best that your obeisance be given the king, my father, rather than myself," her words came soft and trembling.

"Ha, La," I said boldly. "My very presence assures your father of my utmost loyalty. I bend my knee to you, my lady, as offer of myself to all your needs."

The Princess blushed quite pinkly and the king, catching the faintest of humor in my voice laughed loudly. "Now here, indeed," he admonished Murie, "is both a gallant and a warrior beyond your taming. And I want not your knee yound Sir," he turned to me. "For rather would I have your hand. I welcome you as does my Queen. And I give you our royal and fatherly thanks for the life of our daughter."

I bowed deeply to them both, making the intricate sweep of leg, plumed cap and arm that I had made the princess four days before on the great south road. King Caronne was the bluff and hearty type, in contrast to the light and airy Queen Tyndil. She was as blonde as the king was dark. And I could see that though Murie favored her physically, it was her father's ways that she had taken as her own.

And Hooli was there too. And he was not alone. He had a companion as like to himself as two toys on a rack. They sat side by side on a great fur-covered couch and watched us benignly—amusedly. Alike as two peas? Not exactly. At second glance

I hardly believed what I saw, for the other Pug-Boo, known as Jindil, according to Rawl, had a large black circle around one eye. . . I was reminded again of the dreams of my childhood.

Directly behind the seated Pug-Boos there stood a tall and patriarchal individual who I assumed to be the court sorcerer; which indeed he was. He waited silently until we, following the King's suggestion, seated ourselves in something of a circle. The guards and the page were then ordered from the room, the sorcerer introduced as Fairwyn, and the king began to talk.

"Young Sir, my good nephew—and you Lord Hoggle-Fitz and daughter, I bid you all a hearty welcome to Glagmaron. There is no question now that cruel and harsh winds are blowing from the River Sea. So speaks our Sorcerer and Seer, good Fairwyn, and so, indeed, does all that has transpired. I had not thought to see or hear of Yorns and men of Om in our fair parts. But these things have come to pass—and even, as it were, a Vuun of the dark creatures. I had not thought to see or hear of vile treachery such as that which lives in Castle Gortfin—and with such rulers as Feglyn of Great Ortmund and Harlach of Kelb who have bowed their neck to Om. I had not thought to hear these things. But now that I have heard and have taken hurried council with certain Lords of the realm, known

to my nephew, and to you, perhaps, Sir Hoggle-Fitz, I will say to you all that Marack has picked up this gauntlet so deviously and so cowardly thrown. . . Know this young Sir, and all of you. Tentatively and prior to your own good council, we have sent couriers so that within three days Castle Gortfin will be under siege of men and Magick.

Om has sought to use our Princess in this great game of chards. They failed. But in similar ways they pursue a double track. This Prince of Kelb is most obviously here to achieve that which the dark power of the Lady Elioseen could not.

"I charge all you in strictest confidence to forbear your anger at what may be said by them tonight. The Prince comes to us under the Trinity Host of peace, and so shall he be treated—for we will not show our hand.—He paused here and drank from a crystal goblet.

"May I have leave to speak, My Lord," I said.

"Indeed, young Sir."

"What thought your council of the Yorns and dark riders, and of the Vuun who passed us in the night, and who seemingly turned south in the direction of Gheese?"

He studied me carefully before he answered. He finally said: "That this force would penetrate both our land and Gheese to scout from the rear. For Om is still held in the mountain passes—or, perhaps, they

move through us to Ferlach for like purpose."

"And if they *remain* in Marack?"

"To what purpose, Sir?"

"I know not," I said. "But it occurs to me, my Lord, that they are a fighting force, rather than scouts. How else the Vuun?"

"Perhaps as eyes, young Sir," the King said testily, "from aloft."

"Nay, Sire!" I said boldly. "We, Sir Rawl, myself, and the good Lord Hoggle-Fitz have seen this force which, in all sooth, the Princess and the Lady Caroween did not. They were great Yorns and men-at-arms and knights. They travelled not lightly, Lord, as is the wont of scouts, but with strong weaponry and 300 dottles. The Vuun, I warrant, has a purpose other than 'eyes aloft.'"

"And that would be?"

"To fly with something they have taken—out of the land of Marack; something of great value which, once captured, they could not trust themselves to hold."

"What say you, Fairwyn?" The King spoke bluntly to his sorcerer who still stood watch behind the flatly staring Pug-Boos. I thought as I turned to Fairwyn and caught Hooli's eye—he being the one without the circle, that he smiled at me ever so slightly.

Fairwyn had a most thin and reedy voice; though it was direct and without pretense or guile. He said simply, "It seems as the runes sug-

gested, My Lord. But I would add now, in view of this young man's words, that not only is the Princess endangered by this Prince of Kelb: and we had deemed it the sole danger; but it is quite possible that the Vuun is meant to carry a *living human being* . . ."

Queen Tyndil gasped. Murie's hand went to her throat and her eyes grew big. Hoggle-Fitz lunged to his feet, an oath on his lips and his hand on the hilt of his court saber. His lithsome daughter fled the arm of Rawl Fergis to move to the side of Murie Nigaard.

The King then swung back to me. "It would appear," he said sharply, that there may be something of the Collin in you, as my beauteous daughter insists. But no mind. We will leave this now to talk again when we have dined and seen this 'Prince of Kelb.' We honor you Sirs, and Lady—he bowed lightly to Caroween—and we ask that you accompany us to the dining hall.

So saying he arose and touched a small silver bell, then took the queen's hand and led off toward the now opening doors.

I would not let this chance go by. I moved instantly to the Princess, offered my arm and said simply, "My Lady?"

Murie smiled, her visions of the Vuun erased. She put her small scrubbed hand on mine and we fell in behind the king and queen and

the Pug-Boos, who had somehow managed to step in front of us. I knew without looking that Rawl and his auburn-furred vixen was immediately in back of us, with the towering Hoggle-Fitz and the almost-ethereal sorcerer, Fairwyn, bringing up the rear.

We went down one short hall to the king's private entrance and waited for the formal blare of trumpets to announce us. We then stepped forward boldly as the great doors opened.

The banquet hall of Glagmaron Castle on tournament night was a sight to see. Here indeed was the true panoply of feudalism. All that epitomized the most romantic but brutal phase of the socio-economic evolution of humankind was present. It was dazzling; it was also tinsel and running dye. It was the absolute in insouciance for those who sat above the salt. Rank upon rank of Lords and Ladies, knights and squires, banners and pennons, with a number of tables on the periphery of all this allowed the graduating class of student warriors. To say the scene was less than fantastic would be to deny all reason.

We advanced down a great aisle separating a double row of tables, to the king's table. It was on a raised platform and at right angles to those below. The roars and aves for the rulers; for the princess, and yes, too, for me—for they had heard

of our adventures—was deafening.

But protocol was such that I was not to eat with Murie. She sat at her father's table—to his left, with the queen, her mother, on his right. On either side of them were a half dozen great lords of the realm, including— and I, perforce, stared in surprise, the Lord, Fon-Tweel, *Kolb* of Bist, whom I had bested prior to our abduction.

He scowled darkly when he saw me. I bowed ever-so-slightly and sneered back at him. Then Rawl, Caroween, Hoggle-Fitz and I were shunted to the first table to the right below that of the king.

Behind each diner was a liveried servant. And the feast had needed only our arrival to begin. At the very point of the king's seating himself a veritable parade of trays and service poured from the kitchens. Great roasts and shanks of meat from all manner of strange beasts. Tureens of gravies sufficient to drown a child. Huge pasties of a conglomerate of fish and fowl; vegetable puddings; birds in every size and shape; each with his own feathers returned for dress-up. Fruits and ices, deep-dish pies and curries. There seemed no end to it. And certainly there was no end to the varied wines and svizz that swept like the River Cyr through the monstrous hall.

For one brief moment I felt the heavy hand of Hoggle-Fitz upon my shoulder. His voice rose, booming

above the bedlam, saying: "How now, Sir Collin. We shall see if you are as good a trencherman as you are swordsman and gallant. I would beseech you to honor our God, good sir, by eating all that is placed before you; for food is truly an end product of all his works." Upon saying this Hoggle-Fitz crossed himself quickly; sat down and fell to.

I was ravenous and I ate wolfishly with knife and fingers. The roar of the great hall became a hum, with only here and there a shriek or scream to denote some conversational point or *bon mot* well placed.

What with the flow of wines and such, I drank a goodly quantity. So much so that had I not eaten as Hoggle-Fitz suggested, I would have, indeed, been drunk.

Through it all my eyes but seldom left the princess. And only then to view the table opposite my own. There sat Keilweir, Prince of Kelb, grouped round by his lords and entourage. No court-gallants they, but obvious fighting men; as was the Prince, himself. He was tall, slender of waist and heavy of shoulder. And he was no down-faced youth. He was past thirty. His tanned and weathered features were marked with two great saber cuts. I noted that my companions, too, were intensely aware of this table of the Prince of Kelb.

As time passed and eating died—to be replaced by drinking only—

the hum increased to roar again. Here and there were shouted challenges for the morrows 'games.'

Napkins were brought, and bowls of water. And we cleansed our hands and faces. Relaxed and at my ease I turned to Rawl. "What think you of these men of Kelb?" I asked.

"That they are less of court-train and sweet reason than one would hope to see," he replied laconically.

"Aye, and Aye, again," Hoggle-Fitz put in. "Where I for one, would hope to see a royal wedding party, I see instead most hardened warriors. And, Master Lenti, the one to the left of the Prince, he with the spade beard, is not of Kelb, but of Great Ortmund. He is the *Onus* Hilless, a truly stout and resolute sword."

"What think you of this?" Rawl asked. "Why would a knight of Ortmund be with a Prince of Kelb?"

"I know not," said Hoggle-Fitz.

"The Yorns and men of the hundred riders came, too, from Kelb," I pointed out. "They have much in common. For they are *all*, as our worthy Hoggle-Fitz observes, most seasoned warriors."

"You think, Sir, that they are not two groups, but truly one?" Rawl asked.

"I know not," I said. "But if they plan a joining for some purpose, it just may be that we can dent their power. A challenge or two for tomorrow, for example."

"Or," Hoggle-Fitz insisted fierce-

ly, his eye upon the *Onus*, Hilless, "though it be somewhat awkward to do this to a 'wedding party', we could ask for an 'onset of fifties', and strike down half of them."

"It is not meet, Father," Caroween said bluntly. "It is against all laws of chivalry. A visiting Prince who comes a wooing beneath a flag of peace? For shame!"

"Yon pennants are peaceful?" Rawl almost shouted. "I do adore you, M'Lady, but I would remind you that all is topsy-turvy now. Om is in Kelb—and the 'laws' no longer hold."

"We could," suggested Hoggle-Fitz, ignoring his spitfire daughter, "with the help of Ormon, provoke *them* to challenge *us*."

"A well-made point," Rawl said. "And twil not be difficult. I warrant there will be sufficient insult for either side, for the atmosphere twixt here and there already reeks of it—Look you! The Prince's ambassador asks leave to speak."

Certain young knights were even now before the king, petitioning the royal favor for the morrow's assignments in tournament listing. The pleas for redress against supposed discrimination had become quite loud. With the advance of the Princes' ambassador, the Prince, himself, and two stalwarts to the place before the king's table, all this was swept aside.

A great and sudden hush seemed to permeate the hall. Those seated

knew quite well waht was afoot, and dearly welcomed the interplay that would ensue.

At the ambassador's approach, Fairwyn, the king's sorcerer, arose. his hands worked rapidly at some invisible web and he intoned what seemed a litany. When he had finished I was not surprised to see an intrusive skein of fog surrounding himself, the Pug-Boos, and the Royal Family. . . No one so much as batted an eye. And I knew that this *magick*—for that's exactly what it was—was both an expected protective thing, and at the same time commonplace.

There then began an exchange of compliments, and formal fol-de-rol, including a listing of the king's lineage, that of his wife, etc., plus the illustrious background of the Prince of Kelb. This done—and while the Prince was still slightly bent in protocol obeisance to the person of King Caronne—the ambassador began the purpose of their visit.

The bluntness of his first few words were indicative of his tactic. "And now, oh mighty sire," he said. "We touch upon a most important issue. We do, upon the orders of our King, Harlach, present his son for other than your grace and scrutiny. The Prince Keilweir of Kelb, being desirous of a bride of his class and blood does settle his choice upon your daughter, the most beauteous and demure of creatures, the Princess Murie Nigaard.

To firmly base his suit in something else than talk, he asks that your Princess, together with a goodly train and entourage, return with him to Kelb, whereby, and during the duration of her stay, she will be made most welcome and satisfied of the person and intention of our Prince. . . We ask this in the name of Kelb and of her rightful ruler, Harlach."

No bridal go-between had ever been more curt; no request more terse than that. It had been, in fact, more directive than request. I looked to the others for affirmation of my thoughts.

There was audible tension; a hissing of indrawn breath, and the silence continued so that the patter of a dubot's feet would have been thunderous indeed.

The Princess had arisen, her face white, her two hands clenched. Rawl, likewise. And twice times two hundred others at the tables nearest us. Each great Lord around the king was on his feet.

The reedy voice of Fairwyn came floating over this baited throng—insistent, diplomatic, soothing, and deliciously negative. "We hear, Oh gentle Sirs," he said. "And though we be honored at your request and continence, we would suggest to you and yours that such pursuit of marriage bears thought and much discovery. We ask, in sooth, that time be spent on this. And that you, good sirs, do spend *your* time with

us in likewise contemplation."

Hurrah for Fairwyn! He had managed to say exactly nothing and say it well. But if I had thought that even he could assuage the tender skins of Marack—or of my Princess—I had forgotten Camelot.

The Princess Murie's voice rang out insultingly above the crowd. "Oh, gentle sir from Kelb. Would's't have sufficient gogs for me to milk upon my visit? For in sooth it seems that a wife of yours must need to learn such arts and more. And tell me of your fair land. Has't plumbing for my daily bath, or would I—since you are so favored—use the open sea upon your shores?"

The Princess' sally was greeted with a roar of laughter so that the knights of Kelb and those of Marack too clapped hands to court sabers.

"Most gracious sire," the voice of the ambassador called out. "We seek no quarrel here. We come in peace and good intent. Is this then to be our answer?" he waved an idle hand at the aroused revelers.

"You came in peace, and so tis true," Fairwyn replied. "And in like manner you may go—whatever is your wish, good sirs. Your point is made and we, in due time, shall give our studied answer—a toast," he cried out suddenly, "to your good choice, Sir Prince; and to all those, who in honor, seek our princess." He lifted a frail hand with crystal cup and wine. And, the tension punctured, a thousand hands

did likewise.

"Nay," Rawl muttered. "We cannot let them go like this."

I watched the others quietly; for Rawl, like Hoggle-Fitz, the king and Fairwyn sensed what I now *knew*. The tactic was simply to provoke and thereby distract; to focus Marack's anger upon Kelb alone for whatever days would then ensue. During this time of a misdirection of energies, other peripheral and important actions could unfold, including that of the 100 riders and the Vuun. Om's methods were not only skillfully divergent but manifold, selective and masterful. That their tools were lesser clay was something else.

"Let us provoke them further then," I suggested wickedly, above the shouting of the Prince.

Keilweir, given a glass from the king's table, drank it down (he had ignored the Princess' sally). Refilled, he held it high and said above the bedlam: "A second toast to the fairest of damsels, our Princess, who I would hope will honor our request—and soon."

"Stay your glasses one sweet second," the Princess called out. "For if we must toast, have done with tedious gallantry. Sirs and My Lords all. I would salute a truly brave and worthwhile knight amongst our company; without whose strong arm I would still be locked in Castle Gortfin—to young Sir Lenti—*descendent of the Collin!*"

Well done! I chuckled mentally. My Princess was, indeed, a master of the duel. While drinks were tossed I rose and bowed sardonically in the direction of the Prince of Kelb. He had been put aside most prettily. His face was a stormcloud as were those of his cohorts: And, at that very moment, Rawl chose to make our move. He arose, stepped forth from between the tables and shouted loud for all to hear.

"As one of those who shared adventure with *Sir Collin* (he was getting *all* accustomed to the name) and my sweet cousin, the Princess, most noble sire, my King! I beg your leave to speak."

"It would appear," the king said loudly, brushing aside the mutterings of Fairwyn, "that you, my gentle nephew, have already done just that. . . Say on! You have my leave."

And indeed he did. For it seemed that all of us; those who knew of Om in Kelb; the witchcraft of the Lady Eliosen; the hundred riders, and the gathering storm, were of a like mind. And this included those lords to right and left of the king's person, who formed his privy council. For even they sought not to speak. But as if by design had left the floor to Rawl and those of us who just might follow. There was such deep understanding; such unspoken unity here—except for the glaring Fontweel—that one would suspect an *outside influence*.

I thought of this phenomenon in the brief seconds left to me before Rawl spoke again. *I* was certain of two things and *knew* that through some strange telepathy, the others were certain of them too. These were: One, that the men of the Prince Keilweir and the 100 riders, together with the Vuun, had purpose in Marack other than wedding feasts and scouting; two: that to circumvent or blunt this effort—while simultaneously planning massive action of our own—they *must* be dealt with. And we would have to do this as to show but a normal Camelot reaction to slight and slur; namely, bravado, challenge, and clouded heads. That and nothing more.

"My Lords," said Rawl, "though all of Marack knows of the pact of mutual aid concluded between foul Om and those of Kelb and Great Ortmund, do they know too," he raised his voice, "*that Yorns and dead-alives are seated now in those fair lands?*"

An instant roar grew round us like a crashing wave, and all eyes were focussed upon the men of Kelb.

The Prince's face clouded. He shouted in defiance. "This is a foul and vicious lie!"

"Oh, *indeed*, Sirrah!" Rawl continued. "With mine own eyes I saw this: first in Castle Gortfin, and then last night. Last night, on the great road—Yorns and men of Kelb. Where are they now, Fair Prince:

and tell us true, *who* rules in Kelb, your father Harlach, or the miserable fiend from below the River Sea?"

"I say again, you lie!" screamed Keilweir. "How could you know that these were men of Kelb?"

"My Lord," Rawl addressed the King, ignoring Keilweir's last remark. "Hast heard? I offer now my challenge to the Prince—And he will prove his insult on my body, or I on his and *all else* who would support him in this matter."

The roar then ebbed to heavy silence, with every pair of ears strained for each word.

The ambassador, white-faced, and aware of what was happening, laid a restraining hand upon the Prince's arm. "We accept no challenge, My Lord, King," he said loudly and firmly. "And certainly not from sniveling glory-seekers. It was our honorable intent to seek the Princess Murie Nigaard's hand in marriage—that only. Now, with your most gracious permission, Oh, Sire, we will to the road again and leave this matter for another day."

A great sigh like a souging wind swept through the gathered throng. The trap had been sprung. But the baited *Flig* was about to escape the hunter; albeit against its will, for the Prince of Kelb was virtually frothing at the mouth.

Whether he would win over his ambassador or not I did not know. It was a chance, however, we could

not take. So. I moved out to stand with Rawl before the king.

"Oh, Sire," I asked. "Since much that does not meet the eye seems astir here, I beg one question of this man of Kelb."

The king glared down at me. The unity of telepathic thought had seemingly left us for he said harshly: "We would have done with this, and now! But you, young Sir, have earned your question. Say it!"

I turned slowly to the Prince and the men around him.—I caught his eye and held it. "Oh, Prince," I said. "What I may lack in courtly knowledge I make up for in folksy wisdom. It is known, for instance, that gentle Pug-Boos live only in the lands above the River-Sea. Neither the Dark Earth of Om nor any vassal thereof has ever seen a Pug-Boo. . . I now submit to all within this hall, that since Om has moved beyond the River-Sea there are no longer Boos in either Kelb or Ort-mund. . . They have gone to whence they came."

The quiet was heavier still. He finally said, "My Lord." The Prince was shaken. And by this very fact I knew that I was right. "This is not true."

"*It is true!*" I said. "And we shall prove it on your bodies. It is written," I improvised, "that those who have no friendly Pug-Boo for the singing and the council, are less than men. I see together with you a hundred seasoned warriors,

which in itself for marriage vows is passing strange. No matter. If you are less than men, then I, together with this good knight, Fergis, the noble Hoggle-Fitz of Great Ort-mund—and *forty-seven untried students from the Collegium of Glagmaron* do challenge the half of you to an Onset of Fifties for that is all that is allowed. We propose if I am right, and you are less than men, to thrash you soundly. If I am wrong good Prince—if such is truly *not* the case—then we commend ourselves to Ormon, and may he have mercy on our souls."

The roar turned deafening again; especially from the student tables to the rear of the great hall. I knew that upon the instant of my word they would be at dice for entry to our ranks.

Never had such a challenge been issued: Students against seasoned knights. If I were wrong, though blades were dulled and points the the same, we would lead our students to a slaughter. But I thought not. Already, just the thought of what I said had reached them—for, as stated, they knew there was no longer Pug-Boos in Kelb, and they were sore afraid.

Only the Prince and his hundred had remained silent, contemplative. For they knew that they were trapped, and that if they failed before so unlikely a foe; and if the populace of Kelb and Ort-mund got wind of it; assumed the

loss of the Boos to be the reason—then Om was not as solid upon our shores as it had been.

Touche! Check! And check again.

All waited for Keilweir's reply. It was not long in coming. He looked at his ambassador and at his hundred Lords and knights. He then stepped forward, saying simply, for he had no other choice, "My Lord. What was a jolly wedding party is now a challenged company at arms. We do, to clear our name, accept this offer of the strange knight. And further, now and for this very reason, we do beg your leave to withdraw to choose our 'heroes' for the morrow."

Permission was granted.

Amidst the ensuing bedlam of cheers and catcalls following them through the hall, my eyes turned to Murie. Her hands were clasped beneath her chin. Her head was back, and from her throat came peal after peal of delighted girlish laughter. The fact that I too could easily be killed apparently escaped her. But, no matter. I was 'hooked' and I would not have had it any other way. When she quieted down I grinned and winked from where I stood. She shook her head from sheer exuberance and dared throw me a kiss.

Over her dainty shoulder the Pug-Boo without the circle round his eye, winked too.

When the history of Camelot is

finally written it will most definitely include the famed 'on-set,' 'The Battle of the Fifties.' For no more outlandish and preposterous a bickering has yet been seen in all the Galaxy. It began with magick. It may well have ended that way. But throughout the entire charade was an element, too, of pure and simple guts.

By morning all of Glagmaron City and many outlying villages had heard of the great challenge. Therefore, where normally half the countryside would rally to attendance, now it seemed that *all* had come. The area of battle, the 'lists' was approximately one hundred yards by fifty. The tiers of seats would hold ten thousand and no more. The tents of Lords were placed to north and south. But fortunately all the area to the east sloped gently up from the Lists, so that the 50,000 gathered there could also see. The king's guard patrolled the peripheral areas so that the peasants and tradesmen did not intrude upon the tents of the lords or upon the field itself. All was carnival. All was pageantry. There seemed as many piemen, venders, svizz peddlers and whatever, as to equal again the gathering itself.

We: Rawl, myself, Hoggle-Fitz and our forty-seven chosen students—and a choice bunch of heavy shouldered, thick-necked street fighters they were—were gathered at the south-east point of the great

square; with those of Kelb at the north-east. We had been given armor, a choice of dulled weapons, and shields—which we had hurriedly painted for the students with an amalgam of our three colors—and one great knobbed jousting lance apiece. Behind us, crouched and saddled; some belly-flat upon the greensward, were our fifty dottles. We were at ease.

At quarter-day (ten a.m., greenwich) the jousting and dueling would begin—but not for us. We were last on the card. The feature event of the day. A few minutes prior to quarter the king appeared at the castle gate. From that point he could look down upon the dark sea of heads, brightened here and there by the garb of women and the sparkling headpieces of archers and men-at-arms. The lists, from his vantage point, was but a narrow strip of green, marked only with the banners, pennons and flags of heraldry. A path had been cleared to the tiered stands and down this he came, followed by Fairwyn, the Queen, the Princess, and all the great lords of the privy council. The Pug-Boos did not attend.

Once the king was seated, to the blare of the trumpets and the roar of the crowd, the tournament began.

For those familiar with a feudal culture and its concomitant nuances, that which then ensued was by no means new or strange. Great knights

and lords rode forth fulfilling certain pledges, vows; and/or in answer to some challenge or fancied insult, and battle was joined. . . Through all the morning men in suit armor went sailing through the air at the hefty nudge of a jousting lance; were beaten to the ground by sword or mace; were pounded to a pulp by other means so that they staggered dazedly around in circles—and all to the constant blare of silvered trumpets, fanatic cheers of wagering supporters, and the accompanying impersonal roar of the crowd that will cheer any onset. They fought in singles, doubles, and sixes; on dottles, in chariots, and sometimes afoot. When lunch was finally called the tents of the *chirurgions* were already stuffed with those with broken limbs, cracked pates, and wounds of a hundred kinds.

It was just then that Murie Nig-aard chose to visit us. She came with Caroween, five pretty maidens—which set our student crowd to roar their pleasure—and an armed guard to force their way through the crowd. They looked a lovely sight indeed, before us on their kneeling dottles. It actually was the first chance I had had to be with Murie since our arrival. She looked delectable, as did the others in their furred and velvet jump suits of varied colors. Murie's was milk-white, matching the armor she had sent me.

"How now, my Lord," she said in greeting, "we meet again." She stepped from the kneeling dottle with a certain boldness and took my hand. The Lady Caroween did likewise with Sir Rawl; while Hoggle-Fitz, somewhat perplexed by all this 'coupling,' retired to sit beside his dottle. The young student-warriors pressed round admiringly 'till I shooed them off.

I looked down into the purple eyes and said simply, "Murie. I would speak with you without the nonsense of court and custom." I drew her to one side, to where my dottle rested. We leaned together against its rump and gazed out to the deserted lists.

"I am still the princess, Sir," she chided me, "and it may be that you grow too bold."

For answer I drew her gently close. She stiffened, then relaxed, but made no move to draw away. "Enough," I said softly. "I would rather be with you in silence for one second, than an hour with the childishness of protocol."

"You speak but strangely, Sir."

"Do I, indeed? Do you really believe that?"

"No, My Lord." She seemed suddenly subdued.

"Then agree with me that our stars cross strongly. And, I think, perforce, that we will be together."

She pressed closer so that I could feel the length of arm and thigh against me. Her voice was hardly au-

dible. "I do agree, My Lord."

I smiled at that; looked down into her purple eyes and elfish face and said: "And since truly I do accept you as my Lady, am I, indeed, your Lord?"

"In sooth, you are."

"Well," I said, "were we not in dead-center of all of Glagmaron I would take you in my arms."

"And I would come, but gladly."

"Great God!" I said. Then, "Look, my princess. This comes so sudden. After this nonsense is through—if my head not decorate a lance—I would see you alone, and for a space of time. There is much to say and I would say it."

She looked up at me and held my gaze. "That chance will come, My Lord," she said, "more quickly than you think. For there is council of war of which you will be informed; tis said that it will encompass all our world. But other than that runes, too, have been cast. They tell of serious danger to myself if I remain in Glagmaron. My father, for this reason, sends me tomorrow morn to the great sorcerer in the Snow Lands. There in hiskeep, they say, lies my only safety. *You* are to head my escort, my lord, Lenti—for *I would have none other.*"

Her final words seemed to prompt again the possessive look of yesterday. The shock was absolutely overwhelming; that this small furry-tummied female could so befuddle my eighteen years of Galactic training

in all the 'logics' was beyond belief. But at the moment I wanted nothing else; nor would I have it any other way.

Across the field the trumpets blared again.

"You will see my father tonight," Murie said. "And you will see me too."

"As to that last," I murmured, "I would hope for nothing else." Still holding her hand boldly, before all the others, I walked her to her dottle—

Caroween had already mounted, she now sat stiff-spined in the saddle saying loudly to Rawl: "My Lord, I shall watch thee closely. And if it go against you and these good knights and my gracious father, then expect me in the field. For I do not hold with ritual nonsense; and I will thrash them all who dare to win against us."

"Have done!!" The voice was that of Hoggle-Fitz. He had just bussed his daughter roundly in fond goodbye. But even he who knew her had not been prepared for this. "I warn you, Caroween," he shouted. "If you shame us, if you set your meddling foot upon yon green ere all these men of Kelb are soundly whipped—twill be your bottom that will receive the thrashing. Now think on that, and off with you."

The gathered students roared and Murie smiled. The five maidens smiled too, and they together with the escorts saluted us. I stood at

Murie's stirrup; Rawl at Caroween's. Undaunted, the lithe and headstrong red-head damned us all with her eyes, and bent down to Rawl's surprised face and kissed him soundly.

Murie followed suit—so swift, so soft, however, that her lips had barely touched my mouth ere she was gone—All of them gone. All in a flash of lively color and painted dottle paws, to the cheers of our line of students and those who had gathered to watch.

We moved together closely then, myself, Breen Hoggle-Fitz and Rawl. They had not questioned my leadership; nor the what normally would be, suicidal commitment to battle. In fact they relished both the idea that I had made it; and that *they* were a part of it. Such was Camelot conditioning. Ourselves and 47 untried warrior students against the cream of Kelbic chivalry. Insanity? No one but me seemed to think so. I had said the loss of Pug-Boos would make our enemy less than men—and that was enough. Our students believed me, as did Rawl and Hoggle-Fitz. The deck was stacked, so they concluded. It but needed their courage now to tip the scales completely and this they were prepared to give.

We had agreed on tactics and strategy. This being to use a light armor, a smaller shield, and to avoid, but lure, their onslaught. The jousting we could do nothing about, but after: well, we would bait

them to a frenzy, tire them, and then smash them down—and we had chosen blunted swords and weapons but half the weight of theirs.

A fresh breeze blew across the field, clouds gathered to the rear. And, since I had planned a bit of magick all my own, I frowned. I needed sunlight.

"How now, Sir Lenti?" Rawl asked softly. "It seems our time is come. Yon sortie of five knights of Glagmaron against those five from Klimpinge would appear to be the last."

"They *are* the last," Hoggle-Fitz said. "And I for one am glad to see this."

"Then arm and mount," I said. And fifty students other than our forty-seven helped us to do just that. I wore white armor, Rawl, red, and Hoggle-Fitz black; and all the students, green. I felt most smugly proud to see my heraldry upon their shields. It dripped in gaudy colors on my own—as stated, it was a sprig of violets upon a field of gold. Rawl's blazonry was three scarlet bars upon an azure field; and that of Hoggle-Fitz, the dainty Dernim tulip of fair Durst in Ortmund: as stated, too, all students wore our three designs upon their shields.

"I would," I said to Hoggle-Fitz, when we were mounted and all in line, "that once confronted with our enemy upon the green, that you, Sir, step forward and lead us all in prayer for both ourselves

and Marack."

Hoggle-Fitz' eyes, in his gnarled and craggy face, flashed gratitude for this request. "I will indeed," he said. "But also for Great Ortmund."

I nodded. "As agreed, I will take the center; yourself to the right and Rawl to the left—and all you would be heroes," I shouted, standing in my stirrups, and moving my great dottle out and down the line—"Remember well, what we have agreed upon. Strike for their weapon, elbows, knees, or throat—and in that order. Above all else, *let them attack*; protect each other. But once your onslaught—at whatever target—*follow through to the end*. AND SO SHALL WE WIN OVER THIS WEIGHTY MESS OF KITCH-ENWARE FROM KELB!"

If nothing else my humour alone would have been sufficient inspiration for the first few minutes. With this gang, though, it was hardly needed. Rawl rode out, then, Hoggle-Fitz; both standing in their stirrups. Beyond, on the field, the last of the knights of Klimpinge were either hobbling or being dragged away, while the victors of Glagmaron received gifts and prizes from the king and his lords.

We spaced ourselves along the line of students as we had planned, made a turn and headed single-file through the swarms of peasants, gentry, knights and archers. We all stood tall in our stirrups, gripping

our lances firmly. As our first rider paced out upon the green Rowl bellowed in a voice I never knew he had—"FOR MARACK! FOR THE COLLIN! FOR MARACK! FOR THE COLLIN!" Our warrior students picked it up, forty-seven strong and lusty voices bellowing in cadence. Long before we were in line and facing north it seemed that all the acreage and tiers of seats were echoing the same—only the 100 knights of Kelb were silent; and, I thought, somewhat morose.

My interest in Hoggle-Fitz religious administrations was anything but pious. I was still Kyrie Fern, *The Adjuster*. I had a bit of personal parlour magick up my sleeve. And with some luck. . . The clouds were gathering again, however, which meant my luck was bad. In fact, the very moment that the king's heralds rode forth with trumpet blare and scroll to proclaim in ritual the reason for our 'argument', a wash of rain swept across the field. Other than lousing up my magick it was to our advantage, since we were the lighter force.

The Heralds were through with their ritual pronouncements and the trumpeters stepped forward. But before they could lift their instruments to their mouths to blow, our Hoggle-Fitz rode forth. His arms were raised above his head. His left arm held his sword, his right, his lance. He said nothing but the trumpeters, seeing him, stayed their

horns. A great silence fell over the field. Hoggle-Fitz turned round, dismounted, placed lance and sword beside his standing dottle and knealt upon the greensward.

And then it happened. Hoggle-Fitz' knees had hardly touched grass when, with a clap of instant thunder and a dazzling glare, a bolt of lightning struck within ten feet of him. . . The great crowd moaned, seeing in this an omen that perhaps the question of the Pug-Boos and Ormon's grace did not favor our cause after all. Before this sighing moan had reached an end, however, an equally glaring bolt smashed down within but a few feet of the Prince of Kelb.

I smiled. Tit-for-tat. Camelot's magick was much indeed in evidence. And if the power of Om had stood forth to deal the first blow, as I reasoned, the power that favored our own—whatever or whoever it was—had matched that blow—but exactly. It occurred to me that this situation would continue to prevail. I smiled again. At that very moment, too, the clouds parted and the sun shown through, settling softly over my forty-seven students and my two brave knights. I seized the moment, pressed the ion beam at my belt, widened its focus so no damage could ensue, and directed it full upon the praying Hoggle-Fitz.

What I had hoped would happen, happened. All his armor, and instantly, gave forth a golden glow so

that he seemed clothed in a veritable aureole of shining light. If Hoggle-Fitz, with his tedious, but pious, mouthings, had ever hoped for sainthood, he had found it now. And the hissing gasps of the great multitude—crossing themselves the while for Ormon's sake—was a thing to hear. The fact that the ion beam had simply activated the high sulphur content of the steel of Fitz' armor, causing a glow akin to that of phosphorescence, was something else—my forty-seven knelt; so did the crowds—*so did the men from Kelb*. And Fitz glowed like the fabled, pious Galahad of Terra, though he knew it not. Indeed, of all that field he alone was not to know until the game was over.

With the glowing and sainted Hoggle-Fitz bellowing *aves* and prayers, I dismounted and walked quickly to kneel by the side of Rawl—for he was also smitten. I interrupted his mumbling cantos, saying softly: "We are much favored, friend Rawl, but tis said that Ormon helps those best who help themselves. Om, too, is strongly at work here. Witness that first bolt of lightning. And more of this magick will come, though in what form I know nought. But be not afraid and pass the word that all that transpires against us *will simultaneously happen to the enemy*. If we bear this in mind we cannot lose."

Rawl eyed me silently. "Yes," he finally said. "I know now indeed

that you are not of Flegis."

"Ask my mother where I came from," I said. "She'll quickly tell you." Hoggle-Fitz was on his feet again. I rose too and so did Rawl. In back of us the forty-seven were up and mounting their dottles. The word I had given Rawl spread quickly down the line. And, when I glanced back at their fresh, eager faces, I knew that we had made it. The instant Hoggle-Fitz was on his feet I switched off the ion beam. He ceased to glow and returned to his place on my right. I must admit that the *aves*, mumblings and crossings of breasts on all sides—generated by his short-term halo—caused him to glow with a personal religious stigmata that seemed for a brief second to equal that of the sulphur treated steel. . . The great crowd sighed.

And then it was the final time. All sun had gone. The rain began. And there we were. The trumpets blared a soggy blast and we were hurtling down the green.

One hundred pounding, madly wheeing dottles; couched lances and shields to the fore—two hundred yards of space. The touch of magick continued so that even as I settled to the job at hand the opposing, oncoming line, wavered, grew dim. But I kept my eyes focussed on the prince—and saw him hesitate. I knew then that I had been right. We had grown dim to them

too. Whatever, it was too late for all concerned. Prince Keilweir's lance missed me completely. I caught him squarely upon the shield, my knobbed lance driving him backward with such force as to snap his saddle girth and send him headlong over his dottle's rump. One down and forty nine to go. I was conscious of a mighty cheer from the crowd. All down the line it was the same. I had expected, since the exchange of lance thrusts was our weakest area, that we would lose here. But we did not. Amidst the crash of splintered lances, wheeing, screaming dottles, and cadenced shouts to every saint that Camelot possessed, I could see that a full twenty of the men of Kelb were down as opposed to but eighteen of our own. Most, on either side, were up again, afoot, blunted swords and maces hacking away in a whirlwind collage of brutal, no-quarter, battle which, had the weapons been honed and heavy instead of dull and light, would have brought death to every man who fell. The Prince remained prone, out of it. Hoggle-Fitz had downed his man, as had Rawl. And now the red and black crests of each were seen as the center of a furious melee.

Lance aside I too used broadsword. And, I must confess, since all went well, that I held back deliberately in the first whirl of swords, light mace and hammer. But even then it was I who hurled

the Lord of Ortmund to the ground, breaking his sword arm in two places so that he would not fight again for many months.

The pace grew heavy, cruel. And I now knew how Hoggle-Fitz had fought clear of all the armored strength of Great Ortmund. For with one single charge he cleared the Kelbian saddles of four knights whose surcoats and blazonry proclaimed their worth as equal to the best that Marack could produce. Rawl, as was his fortune, had in the meantime struck the Prince's brawny ambassador to the turf.

There were more dottles with empty saddles now than full: knights from both sides being pulled from saddle to the ground. It was then I noted that the dottles, wise in the ways of humanoids, when lightened of their load would run off to the side. There with their fellows, they formed a great circle around us to watch the remainder of the battle. At one point, when I had flattened a knight across his dottle's rump with but the crushing weight of my shield edge, I felt myself siezed from the rear by many hands. Then a blow against the side of my helmet caused the world to ring and to disappear in a wall of blackness.

I awoke to find myself ringed with greaved legs and a cadenced shouting of A COLLIN! A COLLIN! from a dozen lusty student throats. I siezed a leg and pulled

myself up; helped further to my feet by willing hands. Then with no shield, but with a great two-handed sword, tendered me by some unknown student hand, I laid about me and picked up the cry 'A COLLIN! A COLLIN! Where my small group had been ringed around, we now ringed them. And the clash of sword and mace against suit armor and shield was such as to deafen all. Three men went down before my Kelbian sword in just three strokes; each with a broken limb or ribs, or both; one man with a broken head—and time passed.

The rain fell hard and we strove mightily against those seasoned warriors. We were three knots of swirling blades, wet turf and mud. All around us lay the fallen. There remained but thirty of ours to twenty of theirs, and no man was rider now. And through this all—where one would confront a foe in a panting, heaving, sweating streaming exchange of blood and bruises, that foe might suddenly disappear; only to appear again in seconds but at some other spot a few feet removed from the original. And, too, if one were to observe the expressions of one's opponent, one could conclude that in that same opponent's eyes he, likewise, had disappeared.

The twenty remaining knights of Kelb fought desperately, furiously. And I thought as I stood back and leande upon my sword that those already prone around us were the

better off, since no man standing—ours or theirs—remained unscathed.

I sought to end it. I had eleven mud-covered, panting students, Hoggle-Fitz eight and Rawl ten. Rawl's helmet was off, one arm hung limp, and blood bathed his face from a deep gash above the eye. . .

Though they fought bravely, despairing of victory, four more of the knights of Kelb were down ere the king's heralds moved forward to blow the finish. Before they had this chance, however, we had perforce, as was our plan, to cripple more. Reluctantly then, for I would not harm good men, were it not necessary, I signalled Hoggle-Fitz and Rawl for one last effort. We charged their bloody circle of sixteen knights from three sides. And I think now that it was the most vicious onset of them all. The blunted swords and lightened maces swung, blindly in some cases, on friend and foe alike; the rain and mud obscuring shields and blazonry of remnant surcoat. And the cheers and screams of defiance were hoarse now, a last measure, I think, of all our energies. When the king's trumpets sounded there were but six of Kelb left standing and twenty-two of ours.

So there were twenty-two of us to stand before the king and all the pomp of Marack; twenty-four, actually, since two student warriors with but a broken leg apiece were held up and brought along by their

comrades.

King Caronne then announced in the most formal of court language that we had won; therefore our cause had been proven just and our charges correct. He offered us the thanks of all Marack for our services to his crown and to his daughter. And on all sides there were cheers of admiration for *The Collin*, for Lord Breen Hoggle-Fitz who though from Great Ortmund, had still fought well for Marack, and for the young Rawl Fergis, cousin to the Princess Murie Nigaard. It was understood that a number of the student-warriors would be *heggled* as a result of their valor, and that Rawl and I and Fitz would name these young men.

The six knights of Kelb, representing the wounded and the remaining fifty—for they alone had fought, were given the order for banishment from Marack with all their entourage: Until, such time as Pug-Boos came back to Kelb and Ortmund; and this proven by these countries' kings.

Small gain I thought as we mounted our dottles and retired from the field. Of the knights of Kelb at least sixteen were dead; of our students, twelve. Of the remainder of both sides the bruises, scars and badly mended limbs would long remind

the participants of the 'Onset of Fifties' at the great tournament of Glagmaron.

I too bled from ear and nose, like Rawl. And I wanted nothing now but warm water, a soft bed; some food at a later hour, and to see Murie. . . Great Flimpls, I thought, as we wended our way back to the castle. How one *does* take up with the color and the substance of the country.

Halfway to the drawbridge I felt an odd persistent buzzing at the base of my skull and I wondered if the blow I had received had caused concussion. . . But no! I pressed the stud upon my belt to activate the circuit. . .

"Well!" I said mentally. "Well! It's about time. It's damned well about time."

"Look who's talking," Ragen's voice came from the node at the base of my skull. "You've been damped out, Buby. No fault of ours. We've tried. Great whoozits how we've tried. But you should have known. . . You should have. . . Look! Here we are. There you are. We've contacted a *Watcher* and got some information that all is not well—that things are, in fact, pretty damned bad. Brief us, Buby."

"Well," I began slowly, as my dottle cantered along, "It's like this. . ."

To be Continued. . .



PIA!

By Dale C. Donaldson

Illustrated by William Stout

20th century urban life, like that of mod-suburbia, has a lot more going on than simple wife-swapping. In effect, the past is always with us— in one way or another.

I wasn't too enthused about the party, particularly as it was a wet, stormy night, typical of Portland's winter season. But Mathilde wanted to go, and after all, I'm only the husband.

Thirty thousand a year in the advertising business allowed me a staff of a dozen artists and writers, the right to bellow and dictate thereto,

the privilege of a late-in-the-morning-early-home existence, and bed and board in my ten room house in the Irvington district. There my authority ceased and Mathilde took over. I was only a husband. And I loved it.

Hutch gave the party. Under the spousely thumb like myself, Hutch was an old war buddy, fast climbing

into the top brackets of the publicity field. His apartment in the Bell Manor Arms gave evidence that he was ready to settle down and build ulcers. His wife, Ruth, was the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. I mused over her delightful figure as I guzzled my Tom Collins.

The apartment held the eight of us nicely. Old man Dunton—with ever a roving eye for feminine loveliness—was Hutch's boss, and was eternally ducking the displeasure of his young, tight-lipped wife, Pia. It was public knowledge that Pia had married old Dunton for his money, and that she gave him nothing but a bad time. He countered by using his wealth in the pursuit of other, more willing women, but Pia remained virtuous. I know.

Paul and Jill Montgomery were still young enough to be completely in love with each other, and had joined our group only for the business contacts afforded. Paul did something in insurance, and Jill was a model. . . hats and dresses in a downtown department store.

" . . . and so I told him that he was off his rocker, and asked him why he didn't go back to the old country." Old man Dunton giggled nervously, and leered at Ruth.

Ruth, self-appreciative of her charm, smiled as she served him a Martini. "And then what did he say?"

"He said that it was old fools like myself who maligned the truth

by ridicule, thus affording the evil a surety of safety." Dunton continued, "And that he was sure that I would be among the first to go." He burst into a cackle of laughter. "I'll see him six feet under before my turn comes."

I groped for Mathilde's hand on the couch beside me. "What's he prattling on about?" I asked.

Mathilde clucked disapprovingly. "Climb out of that Collins, boy, and lend an ear." Then, aware that I really hadn't heard, she explained. "Dunton stopped off at the floor above before coming to the party. He knows a Doctor Chives—or Cheeves. . ."

"And Chives told him that he'd have to stop living so fast?"

"Uh-uh. Chives—Cheeves told Dunton that the goblins would get him if he didn't change his attitude."

"How nice. Ruth!" I called, waving my empty glass. "Play hostess!"

Mathilde pulled my arm. "No. Seriously, Chet, it seems that Cheeves is an occultist. He was at one time a Doctor of Psychology, but left it for the study of black magic when he became convinced that a majority of hallucinations conform to a pattern. Then he went all the way, and devoted his life to the protection of us more skeptical mortals."

"S'fine. Ruth!" I got my empty glass into the air again.

Mathilde shook me. "Listen, go-

of. Cheeves is no quack. He told Dunton that tonight was the night of the full moon. And that Dunton should be careful. And that. . ."

"And that a great big, bloody vampire would fly in the window and suck up what blood old Dunton has left in his alcoholic veins. Could a drunken vampire fly, I wonder?"

Mathilde frowned prettily, and moved away. I could see that I was in for one of her martyred moods of silence.

"Look, kitten. You don't really believe in all this business of ghouls, and werewolves. Why the concern?"

She thawed a little. "No, Chet. I don't think I do. But I do believe. . ."

" . . . seems he can sense vibrations." Hutch's deep voice boomed into our conversation. "He says that he has become somewhat psychic, and can tell when one of the elementals is due to appear."

"But why the emphasis on Mr. Dunton?" Jill Montgomery asked. "And why tonight, of all times?"

"Tonight is the night of the full moon." Hutch answered, glancing at all of us apologetically. "Dr. Cheeves says that he has sensed the vibrations gathering in this apartment for a long time."

I stood, and walked over to where Hutch was holding the group enthralled. "Hutch," I said, "You sound as if you believe this pile of spook tales."

Ruth pushed me gently to a chair. "You haven't heard the full

story, Chet," she reproved softly. "Listen before you talk."

Hutch ran his fingers worriedly through his hair, and sat down on the edge of the table. From then on, his tale was directed mostly to me.

"I met Dr. Cheeves about a year and a half ago when we moved into this apartment." Hutch related. "And it just so happens that Ruth studied under him at the University." He glanced at his lovely wife, and she nodded her head in agreement. "Since he already knew half of the family, the three of us got well acquainted. He told us that he had left teaching to do some deeper research in the field of the occult. He didn't mention the subject much, and it wasn't until about three months ago that he brought up this business about "vibrations." I laughed when I first heard it, and put it down to overwork. I thought maybe he needed a rest." He paused and quickly drained his glass. Ruth took it from his hand as I settled back comfortably to hear a nice ghost story.

"All of you, each and every one, has been to our apartment many times." Hutch looked each person in the eye, stopping when he got to me. "When Dr. Cheeves has come down the next day, or later, he senses the vibrations of the elemental. But the traces are nebulous. He can't identify the exact person responsible. And thus the little gathering tonight."

Pia Dunton rose slowly to her feet. "Do you mean that it is suspected that one of us is an. . . elemental?"

Hutch nodded. "To be more precise, a werewolf!"

Old man Dunton went off into a peal of laughter. "Hutch, m'boy," he gasped, at the end of his cackle, "I knew you needed a vacation. Consider yourself with two weeks off, beginning tomorrow." He chorled gleefully.

No other voice broke the dead silence. I looked thoughtfully at the other members of the group, people I had heretofore considered quite sane and normal. Both Hutch and Ruth were still and solemn-faced, Paul and Jill, young and impressionable, Pia, white-faced, possibly because of her dark European background, and even Mathilde, quiet and reserved. The only spot of normalcy rested with old Dunton, who was gazing hungrily at the twin points of Ruth's satin blouse.

And then the lights flickered and went out.

Of course. A game. I had just enough gin in my system to go along with the gag. Silently, I tiptoed over to the door while the others were gasping with varied fears. I turned the key to lock the door, bent, and slipped the key under the sill, out into the hallway. Better make this good, I cautioned myself, and stealthily slipped over to the phone box on the wall. I

jerked, and felt the wires part. On my way back to my seat, I became aware of a sharp, tangy odor, and flicked on my cigarette lighter to see Pia standing directly before me, her eyes huge and dark. She had always used the damndest perfume!

I broke into the babbled, half-panicked conversation. "Why doesn't someone light a candle?" I asked. "I don't want to get chewed up by some monster when I can't see who's chewing."

Dunton chuckled delightedly.

As Ruth moved toward the kitchen to get a candle, the lights again flickered, then came on in bright intensity. Of the eight, only Ruth, Pia, and I had moved. And of the faces, six were drawn and worried. Only Dunton's was mischievous.

Glancing apprehensively at the light globes, Paul Montgomery addressed the silent Hutch. "Let's approach this with science," Paul said. "Assuming for the moment that there is a. . . werewolf in the group. . . he, himself, knows that he is not human."

"Or she," suggested Hutch, drily.

"Or she. Now, I've always understood that there are definite facts concerning lycanthropy, such as a longer ring finger, hair on the palms of the hands, an aversion to silver, and so on. Am I correct?"

The group nodded solemnly, even Dunton who had evidently decided to play along. So I nodded sol-

emply too.

"OK. So assuming the werewolf is here. . ." Paul moved over and picked up a heavy silver ashtray upon which was mounted a model airplane with sharp wings and tail section, ". . . I think it would be wise to have a little hand inspection to see if we can't locate those identifying marks."

Hutch shrugged. "Good idea, but impractical. The palm of the hand can be shaved, and the offending finger shortened by surgery, or even lengthened by plastic."

"Let's have an inspection anyway," said Jill as she moved over to join her husband.

Old man Dunton cleared his throat. "Let's talk a minute more first. Agreeing that there's a beastie here—I don't, but let's pretend—and if this beastie is indeed a werewolf, it's quite dreadfully dangerous. It would never submit to inspection. That ashtray. . ." Dunton indicated the heavy silver piece that Paul held, ". . . would be less than useless. From all the reading that I've ever done, it seems that only a silver bullet in the heart can stop a lycanthrope. Anybody got a gun with silver bullets?"

"Yes," Hutch answered. "Dr. Cheeves, upstairs."

"Then I suggest that you get it," said Dunton.

Strangely and totally without valid reason, doubt grew. Wives moved closer to their husbands, and I felt

Mathilde's fingers clutch my sleeve. This, I thought, was silly.

I held up my hand. "Wait," I said. "We're really frightening one another." I turned to Hutch. "Tell them that it's a game, and let's get back to our drinking."

Hutch looked at me gravely. "It's not a game as far as I'm concerned."

I felt a little of my reason slipping. "But it must be. Even if it is the night of the full moon, the monster couldn't see it. There's a storm outside, and the moon is covered."

No one answered.

"And if we do have a beast here, why didn't it attack when the lights were out a few moments ago? No. We've all known one another for a long time. Call off the game, Hutch."

Ruth pushed him toward the door. "Go on, Hutch. Get Dr. Cheeves."

"Wait!" I demanded, angrily. "If there's a wolf in here do you think he's going to let you get to Cheeves?"

The room was filled with a strange silence, and I suddenly felt all eyes directed toward me.

"Methinks he doth protest too much," Jill said softly. I felt Mathilde move away from me.

"Dunton. . ." I pleaded.

Slowly, the group formed across the room. Seven of them, even my wife. I found myself at bay.

The humor of the situation got the best of me, and I collapsed into a chair, chuckling. "Go get the Doctor," I said.

Keeping both eyes on me, Hutch sidled over to the door. Then I remembered. "You can't get out, Hutch," I called. "I locked the door and threw the key under the sill!"

The tableau froze. There was no longer question in their eyes, they looked at me in fear, I saw Ruth fumbling behind her.

"And Ruth," I continued, "I tore the phone out by the roots."

By this time, the seven of them were as far away from me as they could get. And the fear was turning to terror. Paul swallowed, and hefted the silver ashtray.

At last Pia stepped slowly forward—ten hesitant steps, which placed her exactly between the group and myself. "What. . ." she asked, voice shaking, ". . . do you want?"

Thoughtfully, I reached out my hands, fingers extended, and slowly turned my palms upward. "Look closely, Pia." I requested. "Do you see any stubble of hair? Are any of my fingers of wrong length?"

She advanced fearfully, watching me with those dark, troubled eyes. Quite carefully, she scrutinized my hands, and then she met my eyes.

"No," she murmured. "They look all right."

I stood up quickly. Pia flinched, but I grabbed her by a soft forearm. "I'm not your wolf," I said to the others in a loud, clear voice. "There's no wolf here."

"But why the door—the phone. . ." Hutch mumbled helplessly.

"It was part of the game I thought you were playing," I answered. "Now if Ruth will get your extra key, you can go after Doctor Cheeves. And I'm quite sure that the beast won't tear you to pieces on the way." My hand slid down Pia's arm, and I took her hot, moist hand. I could feel her relax.

"There's no other key," said Ruth. The group was breaking up now, but at her words, they tensed.

"How about the window?" asked Paul. "Can we get to the next apartment?"

They crowded to the window, all but Mathilde, who stood alone, watching my hold on Pia.

"Thanks for the confidence, partner," I remarked. "Do you think you'll be able to live with me from here on out?"

Mathilde walked slowly toward me, and I could feel Pia releasing her hand. I let her go. After all, she belonged to Dunton. I would have liked to have had her, though, she was soft and sweet, except for her hands which were always tightly clenched. A sign of her virtue, I suppose.

". . . can't do it. Not wide enough. And eight floors down." I caught a mumble from the group at the window as Mathilde came into my arms. ". . . have to break the door. Hey, Chet!"

Hutch strode over to me and

thrust out his hand. "I'm sorry, chum, but you certainly acted suspicious."

I waved aside the hand and the apology. "And what about the window?" I asked.

"Only a five-inch ledge," he answered. "Can't get to the next apartment that way. We'll have to break down the door."

Now that the tension was over, there were eager queries for drinks. People circulated into other rooms, and I left Mathilde to find Dunton. What had made him change his attitude so quickly?

As I crossed the bedroom on the way into the bathroom, the lights flickered again, and went out. There was a moment of intent, black silence, and then the rustle of people as they searched their pockets for matches.

I reached into my coat for my lighter, and a heavy body struck me. It was moving fast, and the impact knocked me over onto the bed. I swore violently as I disentangled myself, but stopped abruptly at the sound of a vicious animal snarl. And then a scream! A woman's voice in high-pitched terror, shrill and—cut off with a blubbing moan. It came from the bathroom.

I leaped to my feet, and regardless of the blackness, rushed for the door. Again the rasping snarl, and a heavy fetid odor of wildness. As I reached the bathroom door, the body again collided with me, and the

weight threw me to the floor. And I was sickeningly aware that I had touched moving wet fur!

I would have lain there, frozen, had I not heard the moans from the woman in the bathroom. I crawled to my hands and knees, and thrust my head into the room. Laboriously, I flicked the wheel on my lighter, and as the wick caught, the electric current came back, flooding the bathroom with light.

For a moment I couldn't move, and then, as my eyes forwarded what they saw to my brain, I staggered to the basin and retched, violently and lengthily. I was aware of Pia as she came running from the bedroom, aware of her sharp gasp, and aware of her immediate collapse into unconsciousness. I heard the drumming of other feet, and moved to the bathroom door, quickly closing it and turning the latch. Whoever was in the lead, slammed head first into the panel.

"What is it? What happened? Who's in there? Open the door! Open, I say!" Frantic fists beat against the wood.

They were all out there now, all but Pia and I, the woman moaning on the floor, and the awful thing sprawled over the tub. I leaned my forehead against the wall while I collected my wits.

At last I pounded on the door for silence. As the babble of voices died away, I called quite clearly, "There's been an accident. Everybo-

dy into the front room except Hutch. I'll let Hutch in!"

"What happened in there?"

"Everybody go but Hutch! Go on! Get away! Only Hutch!"

There was a murmur of voices, among which I could hear Mathilde calling, "Chet, Chet, let me in!" and then a gradual withdrawal. Hutch rapped on the panel. "OK, Chet, I'm alone."

I opened the door, carefully keeping my back to the tub. Hutch's flushed face peered over my shoulder, and I saw his eyes widen, and heard the gasp of nausea. My hand steadied him.

As he entered, I again locked the door, then turned and steeled my quaking stomach.

Ruth, the initial shock now over, was on the floor, her face buried in her hands. She was sobbing, wretchedly. Hutch was bent over her, awkwardly caressing her trembling shoulders. Flung backward over the tub was Dunton—what was left of him. His face was a gory mess, completely unrecognizable. It was as if some monstrous claw had torn his features away, only white cartilage, stringing, gave evidence as to where his nose had been. One eyeball hung loosely from a gaping socket, the other was gone, leaving only a raw blood-filled hole. His lower jaw had been bodily torn away from the skull, and sharp, white bone protruded from the spruting aperture.

The claw had torn again at his

waistline, and he lay disembowled. And above all, over everything else, was the hot, rich stench of freshly spilled blood.

Crooning a wordless tune, Hutch got Ruth to her feet, and we left the bathroom, I carrying Pia in my arms. The other three met us at the living room entrance, and the babble of questioning began.

"What happened? What's the matter? Where's Dunton?"

Laying Pia on the couch, I held up my hand for silence. Mathilde was on my arm again.

"It's no longer a game," I began, "Dunton's in the bathroom ripped to pieces."

Ruth sat upright on Hutch's lap. "I saw it!" she gasped hysterically, "It was a wolf—big as a mountain!" She shuddered spasmodically against Hutch's chest, and her fingers clutched his coat lapels. He soothed her hair. "Don't talk about it, honey."

"Yes, I must!" She looked around wildly, with nearly vacant eyes. With a tremendous effort, she got herself under control.

"I had gone to—the bathroom to put—on some lipstick," she continued. "Dunton came in and began—pawing me." She looked at Hutch for reassurance. He nodded. She wet her dry lips. "And then the lights went out. I moved away, but he followed, and I felt his hands on me. I asked him to light a match, and he did, and I could see by the flare that he meant to make

the most of his opportunity. And then it came!" Her voice broke again, and she put her hands over her face.

"And then. . .?" Paul prompted.

"And then it hit him. By the flare of the match I saw—it. It was as big as the bathroom door, and it—lunged—out of the darkness—big, red eyes, and teeth—like—daggers. . ." A spasm shook her body.

"A wolf?" I asked.

She nodded. "So big—I saw—I saw its jaws close over his face as it struck him, and he fell against me, and knocked me to the floor. The match went out, and then it—it—I could hear the sound of the—tearing, and—the—Oh, God!" She moaned, and buried her face in Hutch's coat.

There was silence. At last I cleared my throat. "It knocked me down twice," I said. "In the bedroom. Coming and going."

Paul spoke sharply. "Then there is a werewolf. And he's here. One of us." He still had his silver ash-tray.

"And if the lights go out again. . ." Pia, who had regained consciousness, spoke from the couch.

Hutch stood swiftly, placing Ruth on her feet. "Let's get Cheeves." He moved toward the door. "C'mon, Chet, let's break it down!"

Quickly, Ruth was in front of him. "If that thing's in here," she said, "it'll kill you when you touch the door!"

Tension mounted in the room.

One of us was a beast. And the rest of us were helpless. It could strike at will, and we had no defense. Stark terror filled Mathilde's eyes, and Jill's, and Ruth's. We men looked at one another cautiously. And Pia, *where was Pia?*

Of one accord, we rushed to the window. Out on the narrow five-inch ledge, stood Pia, slowly edging her way to the next window. Her dark eyes were enormous, but her lips parted in a sickly smile as she saw us. "I'll get Cheeves," she murmured.

We watched her hanging perilously on that ledge until she had gained the next window and disappeared into the room. Then we drew in our heads.

Hutch ruffled his hair distractedly. "Six of us here now," he said, "and one a killer. Chet, what if the lights go out?"

I looked around the room. Of the girls, only Mathilde was there. "Where are Ruth and Jill?" I asked.

"In the kitchen," Mathilde said. "Ruth's going to brew a pot of coffee."

Silently, I ran across the apartment to the kitchen door. Blessing the expensive fixtures of a high-priced apartment, I quietly shut the kitchen door, and turned the latch. The others looked at me in amazement.

"Now there's only four of us," I said. "And if Mathilde and I lock ourselves in the coat closet, there will be only two. That way the

beast can have only one more victim, and will be forced to expose himself."

"What good will that do?" asked Paul.

"Can you think of anything better? And it's only until Cheeves gets here with. . ."

The apartment was ripped with a shrill scream of utter terror: Emanating from the kitchen, the scream grew in crescendo to an unbearable pitch, then abruptly stopped. I beat the other two men to the locked door. As I spread-eagled myself against its surface, I could hear a rasping, snuffling sound from within. We had our wolf!

"Let me in, damn you!" Hutch raged, clawing at my arms. "That's Ruth in there!"

"And Jill!" Paul was beating at my face with his free fist.

Using the door as a leverage for my back, I managed to throw them both away from me. Sobbing, Paul raised the heavy ashtray. "Get away," he cried, "or I'll kill you!"

"Wait!" I raised my hand to fend off the blow. "If we open this door, the wolf will come out. Shall we all die?"

They paused momentarily, and I continued. "What's done in there is done. We can't change it. And we have to live long enough to kill the beast. Wait for Cheeves!"

Paul dropped his hand, and Hutch looked at me out of dull eyes. "Ruth's dead," he said. "She can't be the thing because she saw it kill

Dunton in the bathroom." He turned his head bleakly to Paul. "Your Jill. A monster."

Stupidly, Paul's chin began to quiver. I glanced over Paul's shoulder to reassure Mathilde. And my heart stopped still!

There on the living room floor crouched Mathilde, my wife of eight years. She was on her hands and knees, swaying from side to side. Her head was turned in our direction, but it was no human head. Huge, red-rimmed eyes stared balefully at us, and her face was a horror of canine hatred. She snarled threateningly, and white fangs glittered. Even as I watched, her lovely hands turned to clawed pads, and her sleek thighs to muscled haunches. And then she leaped!

One bound carried her to the living room entrance, and at that moment, the hall door opened. The beast was already in mid-air in her second leap, but twisted frantically, and landed at our feet, snarling, facing the open door.

A small, partially bald man stood in the doorway, and in his blessed hand was the sparkle of a gun. Cheeves!

With a rumble of vicious rage, the wolf lunged at the little man. Without a tremor, he lifted the gun and fired. Calmly and coolly. One shot.

The impetus of the monster carried it halfway through the living room, where it collapsed in a lifeless heap. It lay still on the carpet, cav-

heap. It lay still on the carpet, cavernous jaws agape.

As we moved toward it, the re-transition began. The frenzied expression of the muzzle turned again to the smooth patrician nose of my wife. The slaver jaws disappeared, to be replaced by sweet, warm lips. And the canine body became an outline of adorable womanhood. It was again Mathilde.

Mathilde!

Hutch laughed nervously. "Doc, you got here just in time."

The Doctor came into the room and closed the door behind him. "Are you all here?" he questioned.

Staring apathetically at the slowly flowing death wound above Mathilde's left breast, I heard Hutch answer. "Yeh. All of us. Except—except Pia. Doc, where's Pia?"

"I did not see her. Why do you ask me?"

"But she went after you. The window—the window—the window goes to the kitchen. The kitchen! The animal! Ruth! Ruth!" Hutch sprang away to the kitchen door, closely followed by Paul.

"Stop 'em, Doc," I mumbled. "There's something in the kitchen."

Doctor Cheeves fired his silver gun again, and a bullet splattered on the kitchen door molding. "One moment, please," the Doctor commanded. Hutch and Paul came to a standstill.

"What about this kitchen, and this—Pia?" he asked me.

"Pia went out the window to the next apartment so that she could get to you."

"I saw no Pia. I came down because I was worried that you had not come after me. And the kitchen?"

"Pia went out the window, and Ruth and Jill went to the kitchen," I told him. "And I locked them in. And they screamed. And we heard an animal. In the kitchen. And then—Mathilde."

The Doctor stationed himself in the center of the floor, his gun pointing at the doorway. "Open, if you please."

Neither Hutch or Paul were over-eager. There was no indication of what might emerge. As for myself, I didn't much care. How could it be? My Mathilde—dead.

"Mr. Montgomery. If you will please come back into the living room," the Doctor directed. And you," he indicated Hutch, "open the door and step behind it."

After a moment's hesitant pause, Hutch walked to the door, and turned the lock. Cautiously, he put a hand on the knob, then jerked the door violently open, scrambling out of the line of fire.

Pia stood in the doorway. Her eyes were big and black, and her fists tightly clenched. "I heard," she whispered.

Hutch and Paul rushed into the kitchen, pushing her aside. Soon they returned, carrying the women

in their arms. "They're just unconscious," Hutch said to me. "Thank the Lord!"

The Doctor had not taken his eyes off Pia, nor had I. His gun was still lifted, pointing at her heart. She watched silently as the men lay the girls down and forced liquor between their lips.

"I was afraid," she said at last. "I couldn't make it to the next apartment. I went in the kitchen window. I—don't know what happened."

"You lie!" My voice was hoarse and heavy. "I heard the. . ."

"Doctor Cheeves!" It was Ruth, struggling to consciousness.

The Doctor glanced at Ruth quickly. And the moment his eyes left Pia, the room was filled with raging werewolf. Her transition was immediate, and she was 200 pounds of slashing fury, bearing the Doctor to the floor. The gun flew across the room. The sound of the chomping jaws mingled with the agonized screams of the Doctor.

Hutch scrambled for the gun, turned, and pumped two shots into her maddened body, causing her to

leap high into the air. Hutch fired again, and the third bullet snapped her spine. She fell limply to the rug.

Again transition was rapid, and it was Pia who lay with a broken back, bleeding from three wounds. With an effort, she opened her lips, and raised a bloody finger to point at me.

"Get him!" she gasped. "A traitor! Shoot him!"

Awed, but with gun hand steady, Hutch looked from the woman to me.

"Get him! He's one of us!" Blood gushed from her throat, and Hutch bent to her aid. "Quickly—look at his hands. The fur. . . The fingers. . ."

Hutch raised, bringing the gun up quickly.

But I was gone. I howled as I loped down the hallway, around the corner, out of the range of the deadly silver bullet. I howled in glee. For the scent of fresh blood was in my nostrils, and there were humans to be slaughtered in the dark, rainy streets of the city below.

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"Of Brides & Brimstone" and "I'll Come to You by Moonlight"—both tremendous. I can't say when I've picked up a 'ghoulie' I've enjoyed more.

Compliments to artist: William Stout.

Keep them coming—thicker and more wicked but keep them coming.

Sharon M. Blunston
New Brunswick, Canada

The Editor
COVEN 13:

My husband and I are delighted with COVEN 13 which we chanced to see when we went into a shop yesterday to purchase a fishing float.

May I tell you how COVEN 13 affected our day?

We went to a very exciting fishing lake Pinantan, my husband to fish and I to dig around the shore for Indian fishing-spear points and other artifacts.

On arrival we started to read COVEN 13 while eating our luncheon sandwiches and found your publication so absorbing and enthralling that we quite forgot to fish or dig and continued to sit on the lake shore and read until we had devoured COVEN 13 from cover to cover or should I say from coven to coven? Luckily my husband I read at the

same speed so we are able to share a book.

We liked your magazine enormously even though it kept us from our exciting pastimes of fishing and digging.

We discussed each story as we drove home.

I especially liked "I'll Come to You by Moonlight," "In Markham Town," "Potlatch," and "Odile."

May I congratulate you on your excellent Editor's Cauldron?

Best wishes for the continued success of COVEN 13 and my husband joins me in congratulating you on this splendid, first issue.

Winifride Bower
British Columbia

Dear Sir:

Recently, I have purchased Vol. I, No. I, of COVEN 13. After having read your magazine, I wish to criticize and praise your stories, editorial and poetry section.

In order to give my opinion on the stories, I shall list them in their order of rating.

I. Odile—EXCELLENT

Seldom have I read a truly gothic horror, as the one Caillou has just done. It seems that stories like these are dead (forgive this expression) which few writers seem to care about writing today. My praise

to Caillou and may he surpass Odile with his next story.

II. Brides and Brimstone—VERY GOOD. An excellent black comedy with touches of a la Hitchcock throughout the story.

III. I'll Come to You by Moon-Light.—Very GOOD. A chilling love story that shows the bounds of love-right to the beyonds of the grave. Few writers could write a love story such as this one without losing its impact. Jean Cirrito is one of those writers.

IV. In Markham Town—GOOD.

The plot was good, except that you knew from the third page on how it was going to end.

V. Potlatch—GOOD. A slick comedy with a funny ending, and a moral that sometimes it is better not to get everything you want.

VI. The Postman Always—FAIR

Somehow, even though the story was well written, it seems more in place if it was published in AMAZING. This magazine always had several short stories of this nature in each issue and it seems out of place in 13. Still I enjoyed the story, since short-shorts like these do have a sort of special class of their own.

VII. Let There Be Magick—FAIR

Science-Fantasy, such as this story is, also fails to click. This is my own opinion, since science-fantasy, from those that I have read, seem to me a watered down bunch of mish-mash of science and some really chopped-up fantasy, poured toge-

ther and you get said product, science-fantasy. I have come across one or two stories such that were above the normal output of today's writers, but these are few and rare. To get back to this story, the only thing that saved this story from becoming one of the above-mentioned, was the action of the characters. Still, as a final word, this story is not as bad as some that I have read, and I am waiting for the four remaining parts of the story to give my final opinion on the complete story.

Good luck.

Gary S. Mangiacopra
Milford, Connecticut

With the birth of COVEN 13, I am hoping for a revival of the macabre genre, a genre that for the last decade and a half has been asleep in its rotting sepulcher, barred from its well deserved niche in American literature. With the demise of Weird Tales, the stake has been driven through the heart of the horror-fantasy tale, but now, perhaps, through the pages of COVEN 13, the black portals can once again be opened and the devotees of the genre can look forward to the great fiction that they deserve.

Sincerely:

John J. Koblas
Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Dear Mr. Landis:

It was with great pleasure that I saw COVEN 13 on the news stand. Ever since the demise of Weird Tales there has been a huge vacuum in the field of horror literature. You have taken vital steps in filling this void.

Now as to the first issue. . .The logical place to start in a review, of course, is the cover. Excellent. Stout has captured an excellent mood here (something that is sadly lacking in the interior art. . .but what the heck Weird Tales didn't even have interior art when it first started). The dreamlike quality of the witch's robes contrasted with the sharp detail of her face gives a perfect effect. The Editor's column I enjoyed tremendously, as I enjoy any comments on Weird Tales & the classic tradition of horror. I'm looking forward to more editorials of this calibre.

ODILE was undoubtedly the best story in this issue, a really beautiful piece of work by Mr. Caillou. IN MARKHAM TOWN, the other novelette, I'm afraid I didn't care for. Too much of the slick sophistication condemned in the editorial appeared here. I have the same objection to POTLATCH which I thought was the worst story in the book. . .Of the other four short stories I most enjoyed SPELL OF DESPERATION followed by I'LL COME TO YOU BY MOONLIGHT and THE POSTMAN

ALWAYS. OF BRIDES AND BRIMSTONE was too commonplace for COVEN. . .please avoid this type story unless they are extremely good. I thoroughly enjoyed the first part of LET THERE BE MAGIC, but I'll reserve judgement until I've seen the whole thing. The poem also struck me quite well.

All totaled, I thoroughly enjoyed the first issue, and you have my promise to buy all future issues. Best of luck.

Bill Wallace
Pasadena, Texas.

Dear Mr. Landis:

I would like to extend my most sincere congratulations to you on your new publication.

Followers of Weird Tales and associated publications have too long been without a worthy magazine to publish stories of the quality necessary to attract and hold new readers. I hope that your magazine is able to establish itself and produce the new quality writers which this field so desperately needs to survive. In this day of computers, racial strife, denial of individual freedoms, and the suffocation of the general populace in a weltering sea of complexity, it is as a draught of cool water to lose one's self, if only for a moment, in the nether world of the unknown. Thank You.

W.S. Blackwood
Chapel Hill, N.C.

Dear Editor:

Two months ago, if someone was to come up to me and say that a new magazine like the old *Weird Tales* was about to see print, I would have laughed. Ha! I would have said. You mean to tell me that those silly publishers have finally seen the light, and that a magazine like *Weird Tales* would make money? I cannot believe it. . . But it is true! Of course I would have expected it to be for a dollar. . . But no. . . The magazine costs only \$.60 cents. Wonderful! This is truly a great day, that we, the fans of weird literature have a magazine to read, and with no reprints.

Now, to get serious. First I think your magazine is going to make it. I liked all the stories, and please keep all of them new. No reprints! I've read thousands of *Weird Tales* that were published years ago. I don't want to go through another publication of them. New stories, please! No, I am not an old time reader, I am only 18. But, though my years be few my reading is far and wide. A serial in each issue is perfect; and this, plus five or six short stories gives the magazine balance. Don't drop the departments and have a large letter section. Encourage fandom to have a part of your magazine and you can't miss.

Do all this and I'll read your magazine forever.

Sincerely

Joseph Napolitano
Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear Editor:

So, here we finally have it. . . COVEN 13, Witchcraft, Horror, the Supernatural, \$.60, Sept. '69, a monthly weird literature periodical designed to capitalize on the people who read and liked ROSEMARY'S BABY, hopeful of surviving (though I think you'll have a hard time of it) and creating a dynasty similar to that of the old *Weird Tales* era. . . or even surpassing it; hopeful of including names on its contents pages which will become as legendary as H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, and Clark Ashton Smith (if names can possibly become as legendary as Lovecraft, Howard and Smith). . .

Encourage originality in weird tales. The spectrum of weird tales, though limited, is far too wide to include only tales of witchcraft, werewolves, ghosts, and traditional horrors. Lovecraft believed that horrors should be original—the use of common myths and legends bring a weakening influence.

. . . I read your Vol. 1. No. 1. issue with mixed feelings. Hope was one of my emotions. . . This, thought I, may turn into something like *Weird Tales* must have been (I've not been around long enough to have read *Weird Tales*, sadly enough) yet your Vol. 1. No. 1. issue was mainly good but not outstanding. I think No's 2, 3, and 4, will be better. I have faith in the weird tale. May COVEN 13 prosper and grow.

Sincerely
Todd Compton



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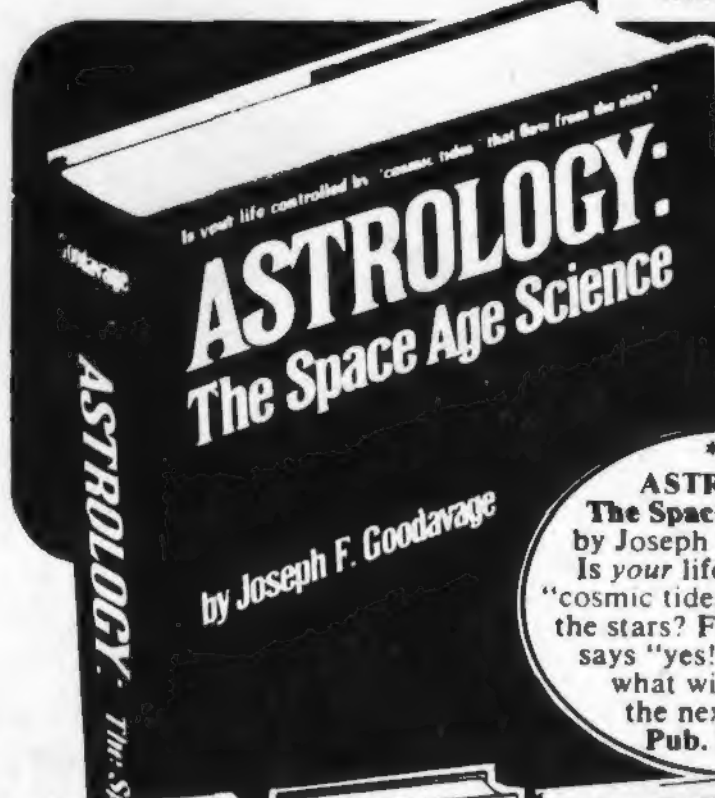
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